

EVALUATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE GOVERNMENT FOR ROMA COMMUNITIES



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MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The importance of finding effective solutions to problems the Roma face calls for a special status of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma communities different from those of other plenipotentiaries of the Government.

The program manifestos of the Government should contain priorities in the approach to addressing problems confronting the Roma and the goals should be more clearly specified.

In light of the negative trends pertaining to social exclusion and marginalization of Roma communities in Slovakia, addressing problems confronting Roma should become one of the key priorities of each government and the role of the Plenipotentiary should be to act as a key facilitator between the representatives of the Roma community and the Government. The person at this post requires a significant support from the Government.

THE STATUTE OF THE OFFICE

To prevent any disconnect in the activities and programs, the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities should be established not merely based on a Memorandum of the Government, but should be grounded in a legal statute.

The Office of the Plenipotentiary should in the future remain under the jurisdiction of the Vice-Premier of the Government; the model according to which it should be placed under the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family (MPSVR) or the Ministry of Culture (MK) is not advisable, due to the complexity of the issues involved and the symbolic meaning attached to this office; also due to considerations of the image of this institution and of the country abroad.

Despite the fact that in the organizational structure, the office belongs under the auspices of the Vice-Premier, it is necessary to more clearly specify to whom the Plenipotentiary is answerable to, and with what institution or institutions this office should cooperate in the process of pursuing its agenda.

It is necessary to provide the continuity in the activities of the office, as well as on the side of expenditures allocated for its operations. It is advised that a separate chapter within the budget be established for this purpose.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE OFFICE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

The authors of this report find the organizational structure of the Office of the Plenipotentiary to be satisfactory, although it is necessary to make improvements in the area of human resources due to the fact that more than 50% of the posts are vacant and thus the office cannot function properly.

It is advised that a network of satellite offices be established in light of the undergoing process of decentralization of state administration in Slovakia.

Due to the complexities of the issues at hand – and the intellectual and psychological demands involved – it is necessary to focus to a greater extent on so-called capacity-building in the Secretariat.

ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE

During the period 2001 – 2002, the office has focused on defining its priorities and started to fulfill these. It is necessary to continue in this trend and to set priorities in the short-term, medium, and long-term. The new strategy of the approach to Roma issues by the Government should contain these priorities.

The post of public relations expert is an integral post that is necessary for providing positive information about the activities of the Government in this sensitive and for public opinion, very emotional issue. It is important to continue to have a positive influence on public opinion through media campaigns, as was demonstrated by the *Baroro* campaign.

In light of the fact that the Roma issue is perceived abroad as the single greatest challenge for Slovakia, it is necessary to take steps to make the website of the office more user-friendly and focus on improving the English language version.

COOPERATION OF THE OFFICE WITH OTHER PARTNERS

Cooperation with Ministries

Activities in favor of improving the situation facing the Roma represent an integral part of the policies of the state – therefore, it is crucial that the particular ministries do not only wait for directives and initiatives coming from the Office of the Plenipotentiary, and that they instead incorporate into their activities the *Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing Problems of the Roma Minority*. The fulfillment of the goals contained in this document should be reflected in the respective budgets of the ministries.

In light of the statute of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities, a good portion of the activities contained in the *Strategy of the Government* are not binding for the ministries; without changes in this area, it will not be possible to effectively move ahead on such a complex issue.

We recommend that the Office of the Plenipotentiary divides, in a methodological fashion, the scope of activities and cooperation with the respective ministries. We propose that this be done after the example of division of competencies between the Office and the Department of human rights and ethnic minorities of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic.

Inter-departmental Commission of the Government

It is advised that the Inter-departmental commission increases the frequency of its sessions. The commission serves as a platform for exchange of expertise and inter-departmental comments, but above all represents the means of legitimization of cooperation on Roma issues. From the post of the Vice-Premier, it is expected to make sure that the interdepartmental commission meets in regular intervals and that the sessions are specific and issue-oriented.

Cooperation with Regional Offices

It is advised to continue in the ongoing cooperation with regional offices, and especially so after the establishment of regional satellite offices of the Plenipotentiary.

Cooperation With Non-governmental Organizations

It is advised that informal cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is maintained. In regards to Roma NGOs, it is advised to cooperate to a greater extent with select institutions active in the field, and at the same time cooperate with the representatives of Roma communities (for example the Roma parliament) in representing the interests of various groups within the Roma population.

EVALUATIONS OF PROGRAM MANIFESTOS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER DZURINDA (1998 – 2002)

It is a difficult task to evaluate the *Program Manifesto of the Government* (1998) in regards to human rights and minorities – since it was elaborated mainly by experts on economic issues and the sections pertaining to more abstract areas of human development, such as prevention of discrimination, or human rights and rights of minorities are given negligible room. In light of these facts, the establishment of the Office of the Plenipotentiary is a highly positive development. The expectations that were held by domestic, as well as foreign observers in regard to approaching the Roma issue by the Dzurinda Government were met with a varying degree of success. Initially, the Government of the Slovak Republic (hereafter referred to as “Government”) was slow to apply specific social programs that would improve the socio-economic situation of the Roma in Slovakia, which was made even more difficult by the lack of financial resources, as well as social capital available to the Office of the Plenipotentiary. In light of this situation, it is not at all surprising that in the society, there were gradually appearing signs of “fatigue” and impatience stemming from the fact that the results of approaches to solving some of the pressing problems with which Roma communities are confronted in Slovakia were barely visible.

The Under-secretary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights, Minorities and Regional Development, Pál Csáky, has in 1999 – 2000 period gradually submitted to the Government new strategies for addressing the problems of the Roma minority. This was done in two stages. On September 27, 1999 the Government of the Slovak Republic has approved resolution # 821/1999 toward the *Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic in Addressing Problems of Roma Ethnic Minority and Compilation of Provisions for its Implementation – Stage I*. Elaborated *Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic in Addressing Problems of the Roma Ethnic Minority as Complement to Specific Provisions for the year 2000 – Stage II*. was approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic on May 5, 2000 (resolution of the Government # 870/2000 – hereafter referred to as *Strategy of the Government – Stage I*. and *Strategy of the Government – Stage II*.)

Generally speaking, the *Strategy of the Government – Stage I*. contains concise and general theses and offers an account of the present situation regarding the Roma population in Slovakia, as well as proposals for approaches to finding solutions. Furthermore, it lists the institutions responsible for the implementation of measures on national, regional, district and local levels. Based on the resolution of the Government # 821/1999, ministers were and superintendents of regional offices were tasked to formulate *Strategy of the Government* for the year 2000 with focus on concrete steps to be taken, including the financial coverage to be provided from the budgets of these institutions. The *Strategy of the Government* was carried out during the period 2001 – 2002 on several levels of the state administration, however, its application has confirmed initial worries over the unclear situation pertaining to the allocation of financial resources for particular activities designed to improve the situation of the Roma.

The Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities is appointed to office by the Government of the Slovak Republic based on recommendation of the Vice-Prime Minister of the Government Pál Csáky. In February 1999, after lengthy negotiations with various Roma leaders, Pál Csáky has selected Vincent Danihel as the candidate for the Plenipotentiary. In light of the fact that the Office of the Plenipotentiary would not be operational for the next two years – the act of appointment in-and-of its self could be seen as a mistake. Vincent Danihel, within the scope of his competencies and tools available, has focused on the systematic task of building the office that was only gradually becoming a standardized institution of the state administration. At the same time, the office was involved in coordination of some activities delineated in the *Strategy of the Government*, and was preparing background reports on the situation of Roma communities. Furthermore, its activities included construction of basic infrastructure and “social” housing for the Roma, and to an extent, the office served as an intermediary between representatives of the Roma minority and the Government.

The quite tense relations between Csáky and Danihel, as well as the discontent on part of Csáky with the performance of the Plenipotentiary, which was supported also by the findings of an audit of his activities have led in the spring of 2001 to the announcement of a new tender for all posts of the Office of the Plenipotentiary. On May 9, 2001, the Government of the Slovak Republic has deliberated on the proposal for the recall from office of Mr. Danihel resulting in his recall from office.

Following Danihel's recall a public tender to fill this post was announced by the Office of the Government. Klára Orgovánová, the director of InfoRoma foundation, and an expert with long-standing international experience on Roma issues was appointed to the post based on the resolution of the Government # 574/2001. Since her appointment to office on July 1, 2001, she has given impetus to the restructuralization of the Office of the Plenipotentiary and opening of the satellite office of the Plenipotentiary in Prešov.

The Roma Parliament and non-governmental organizations involved in the area of minority rights have also declared their support to the newly-appointed Plenipotentiary. Overall, the activities of Orgovánová can be evaluated in a positive way – in a short time since her appointment to office, she has turned it into a professional and effectively functioning institution of the state administration. What remains unclear, however, is why Orgovánová was not appointed to this post back in the spring of 1999. The criticism of Danihel by Csáky seems somewhat surprising, since it was Csáky who has recommended Danihel for the post.

The evaluations by international organizations, the European Parliament and European Commission elaborated after 1998 repeatedly point to the persisting shortcomings in the approaches to problems facing the Roma minority, rights of women and children, environment, agriculture, reform of public administration and lack of thorough financial control. The so-called Roma issue holds a priority when it comes to urgency and importance – the worsening socio-economic status of the Roma minority and prevailing strongly negative attitudes of the majority population toward the Roma represent, in the perception of the European Union (EU), the greatest challenges for the Slovak Republic in the process of integration to the European Union. On Slovakia's territory, there is one of the largest Roma communities in central Europe. The social status of this minority, however, is the lowest of all the countries of the Visegrad 4. For this reason, it is of high importance for the Slovak Republic to engage intensively in activities and approaches in the process of improving the social status of the Roma. In the words contained in the passage of a resolution of the European Parliament (2001): "Slovakia has a real chance to be among the first entrants into the EU, however, it has to close the gap between good intentions on one hand and their actual implementation on the other, above-all in the process of finding solutions to problems the Roma face."

Program theses of the second Dzurinda Government released in the fall of 2002 indicate that the Roma issue remains on the declarative level one of the priorities of the Government. In point 22 of general political theses, states that the Slovak Democratic and Christian Coalition (SDKU), the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) and the Alliance of New Citizen (ANO) have agreed on a thesis whereby "the Government considers the addressing of Roma issues to be a priority. The Government will support specific programs to improve the situation of the Roma by providing adequate financial resources." The program manifesto of the Government released in the beginning of November 2002 devotes more attention to Roma issues than was the case in 1998. Furthermore, the Government proposes to continue in its approach in this area in accordance with the *Strategy of the Government*. However, by its announced proposal that has not been approved yet, for addressing the problems of the Roma, it brings a certain element of discontinuity to the strategy implemented thus far.

The Government's program manifesto contains declarations of continuing governmental support of "useful projects", while focusing on "promoting harmonious co-existence of Roma and non-Roma citizens". Furthermore, the Government vows to support plans to establish "expert and target-specific" capabilities directly in the regions where Romany citizens reside in greater numbers." The submitted proposal to addressing the issues, in the version that has not yet been approved by the Government however, completely shifts the logic of the approach implemented thus far, and can be easily characterized as "utopic". The above-mentioned proposal includes the establishment of a Roma office in Košice that would be tasked with elaborating background information for the Plenipotentiary of the Government. It also includes a network of Roma missionaries in Roma settlements, as well as the construction of so-called central facilities in Roma settlements. Overall, the proposal comes across as inconsistent and incompetent. In case it is approved, it cannot be expected that it will bring significant improvement in the social status of the Roma minority. Dramatic changes in the approach to finding effective solutions to the problems the Roma face could, according to unofficial sources, have the effect of limiting the financial resources that could be made available by international and supra-national organizations to improve the situation of the Roma in Slovakia.

ROMA ISSUES AS A PART OF THE AGENDA OF POLITICAL PARTIES REPRESENTING THE MAJORITY POPULATION

The Roma minority and related issues began to appear in the discourse of political parties representing the majority to a greater extent only after 1998. Up until then the so-called minority agenda of the political parties was focusing mostly on relations with the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. The shift of focus toward the Roma minority was caused by several factors. Perhaps the most important among these was the migration of the Roma to the countries of the European Union – namely to Great Britain, Belgium, and Scandinavian countries, coupled with applications for asylum and the ensuing visa restrictions imposed on Slovak citizens by these countries. Similarly, in a development related to the phenomenon of migration of the Slovak Roma, pressure from the European Union was directed at Slovak politicians to assume a more direct approach in addressing the needs of the Roma. Among the domestic factors, which had led to the increased sense of urgency of addressing the issue, we can mention the repeated theft of potatoes and timber in eastern Slovakia by the Roma.

In reactions and statements of representatives of political parties on the issue of migration, different proposals of measures directed against the Roma were outnumbering proposals offering conceptual approach. In this regard, we can differentiate two different approaches of political parties to this issue. One can be dubbed populist, the other, realist. The proponents of the populist approach were predominantly represented by the Slovak Nationalist Party (SNS) and Smer party. Both political parties were trying to score as many points with their respective electorate as possible, and have relied on majority population's negative perception of the Roma minority. The representatives of these political parties often stated that the migration of Roma was motivated by their attempt to take advantage of the generous social welfare system of the countries of the European Union. The chairman of the Smer party, Róbert Fico has dubbed the migration of the Roma "economic tourism"; similarly, the MP for SNS, Jozef Prokeš has stated in the media that in Slovakia the race problem does not exist and the motives of the migration of the Roma are strictly of "economic nature" (*Sme*, December 16, 1999).

Furthermore, proposals of addressing the problems submitted by the above-mentioned political parties were mainly of repressive nature and ran contrary to the applicable legislation. For example, an MP for SNS Rastislav Šeplák in January 2000 expressed an opinion that the Roma who have left Slovakia should have their passports confiscated for the duration of five years upon their return. The chairman of Smer party, Robert Fico has submitted a legislative proposal to the National Council of the Slovak Republic containing an amendment to the statute on social assistance. The aim was to do away with the provisions that entitle a citizen of the Slovak Republic to receive social welfare assistance for the duration of two months even when he/she is not present on the territory of Slovakia and to sanctions in the form of loss of this assistance for the duration of one year if the individual leaves the country with speculative intention with the aim of gaining financial assistance without performing work and in case he/she applies for an asylum.

The Party of the Democratic Left (SĽS) and SDKÚ came out with a more realistic approach to Roma migration grounded in a matter-of-fact evaluation of the issue and its broader context. The evaluation of the issue by these two parties was based on the premise that the phenomenon of the migration of the Roma was caused foremost by an unfavorable social situation in some regions in eastern Slovakia, as well as a low level of education attained by the Roma population. This rationale has led the representatives of these two political parties to espouse a strategy focused on the creation of new employment opportunities with assistance from EU in the form of funds (Mikuláš Dzurinda). Other politicians have supported measures aimed at improving the educational facilities attended by Roma children, such as establishing creating the so-called specialized levels of education that would help Roma pupils adjust to the school environment and get ready for the first grade at the primary level of education (Peter Weiss, Zuzana Martináková).

The issue of theft of timber and the harvest from the fields in eastern Slovakia has also split the political parties into two camps. Perhaps the most radical reaction to this phenomenon came from representatives of SNS who at a press conference on July 28, 2000 have called on the citizens to resort to "above-standard" means of protection of their property. At the same time, they have demanded that ministers of the interior and defense assign military personnel to protect the harvest in the fields.

Furthermore, the under-secretary of SNS, Dušan Mašlonka has made the following remarks on this occasion: "The Government should be engaged in solving the agricultural disaster – the plunderous attacks of gypsy locust on our fields." The Smer party has also devoted significant attention to this issue, even though the rhetoric employed was not as radical as in the case of SNS. The chairman of Smer, Róbert Fico has sub-

mitted in July 2000 to the National Council of the Slovak Republic a proposal of the amendment with the aim of re-classifying offenses involving small-time theft from the level of misdemeanor to a criminal act (the so-called farmer's law). In this regard, it is necessary to note that the law was supported in the Parliament by all political parties. The issue of timber and field-grown crops represented a good portion of the domestic political agenda of Mr. Fico, who has on numerous occasions, resorted to using populist tactics and rhetoric. For instance, in February 2002 in the daily *Sme* he has written the following: "I can understand if a clever conman or the so-called white collar criminals capable of bribing anybody and everybody evades justice. But if an uneducated Roma in plain sight of the whole community steals in a nature preserve area and usurps his domination over the law with an axe, the mockery of justice gains the pathos of perfection. ... What does the Government intend to do with the mafia and corruption, if it cannot deal with thirty Roma with axes..." (*Sme*, February 14, 2002)

The Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) has also attempted to use to its political advantage the situation that has arisen over the theft of agricultural produce on the fields. The then vice-chairman of the party, Jozef Kalman has criticized the police that it applies a different standard to Roma than it does to other citizens. In his opinion, this goes against the anti-discrimination principle. A more matter-of-fact stance to finding solutions to the arisen situation was adopted by the Christian Democratic Party (KDH). KDH has in the spring of 2001 initiated a discussion about the kind of protection of agricultural fields that would be legally acceptable. At the same time, KDH has recommended to citizens that they employ measures in line with applicable law to protect their property, such as by organizing "field guards". Under-secretary of KDH, Vladimír Palko has on numerous occasions in interviews in the media stressed the fact that any eventual passage of an amendment to the criminal code as it was proposed by Mr. Fico would be excessive and unfounded.

Representatives of SNS and Smer party in their statements regarding Roma issues have often employed various demographic development trends estimates of the Roma population. In June 2002, Mr. Fico has used an estimate according to which by the year 2010, there will be upwards of 1.2 million Roma living in Slovakia, out of which 800,000 will be dependent on social welfare. In his opinion, this trend of development represents a serious threat and could lead to the collapse of the whole social welfare system. In this regard, he has proposed a legislative amendment stipulating that only families no more than three children would be eligible to receive social welfare payments and the school attendance of Roma children would be a pre-requisite for eligibility for these payments. Similarly, the chairwoman of SNS, Anna Malíková in a discussion show "Sito" on TV Markíza in December 1999 argued that the demographic trend is such that around the year 2010, the number of Roma in Slovakia will reach one million. In this context, she has expressed the following view: "I consider it to be immoral if for instance my money or the money of those employed is used to subsidize someone who does not create anything of value in this country."

Statements and reactions to issues involving the Roma population that could be termed as populist were a common occurrence in the approach of all political parties. Frequently, this approach prevailed over more complex proposals. The program documents of any of the relevant political parties did not contain specific sections devoted to finding effective solutions to problems of the Roma minority. Smer was the only political party that has included in its agenda a more complex approach in this area. It was outlined in the periodical publication of the party and authored by the chairwoman of the social section Iveta Lišková. The priorities of the party as contained in the above-mentioned publication include the following:

- support of social workers in the field,
- close cooperation with non-governmental organizations dealing with Roma issues,
- respect for the rights of individuals and the rights of families to make decisions at liberty, but at the same time being aware of the consequences in terms of demographic development and its impact on the family itself (for instance limiting the social assistance payments for families over a certain number of children born) and the society,
- more thorough advocacy of the idea of linking the social welfare payments and social assistance payments to families with preschool and school attendance,
- initiation of discussion about increasing the effectiveness of social assistance, namely measures preventing its abuse,
- making the position of Roma entrepreneurs equal to their non-Roma counterparts,
- a more thorough utilization of the institute of designated recipient,
- fostering greater tolerance of majority population toward the characteristics of Roma minority.

To an extent, SNS came out with an original idea in 2001 when it announced a competition for university students to propose the best way to approach the problems of the Roma communities. The submitted entries, however, were few in numbers, which was interpreted by SNS as a lack of interest of university students in finding solutions to this pressing issue in the society.

The lack of clarity of positions and the absence of a more complex approach by the political parties in addressing the problems of the Roma minority were also apparent during the pre-election campaign for the local elections (the higher territorial administrative units – VÚC). The issues regarding the Roma minority were major themes in the campaigns mainly in Prešov and Košice regions. Almost all the candidates to the posts of chairmen of higher territorial administrative units did consider the situation of the Roma minority to be an issue demanding a priority attention. The majority of the candidates, however, could not present specific proposals that would be based on attainable goals and competencies vested in the posts of the chairmen of VÚC. Their ideas of how to address the problems of the Roma were at the level of general proposals, and did not go into much detail. To support this claim, we can mention several statements made prior to the elections by different candidates. According to a candidate from Prešov higher administrative unit – Peter Chudík (HZDS – Smer) the Roma problem is “the most alarming in eastern Slovakia and in order to address it, it is necessary to re-evaluate the system of social welfare payments and social assistance paid to families” (*Sme*, November 13, 2001). Another candidate for the post of Prešov VÚC, Juraj Kopčák (SDKÚ – KDH) considered the involvement of the Roma key to success in this area (*Sme*, November 13, 2001).

A candidate for ANO for the post of chairman of VÚC in Košice, Ján Olexa has remarked: “The Roma need help, we all know that. Our priority is to help the Roma by vesting them with responsibilities. We know the way they are. The Roma need to feel free, they need to congregate, they need fire in their lives.” (www.changenet.sk) During the pre-election campaign, also proposals that were highly unrealistic and unfair appeared. For example, an independent candidate to the post of the chairman of Prešov VÚC, Ján Gajdzík has proposed to “export the Roma to the west, to Bratislava, because there, (the inhabitants of Bratislava) do not have a clue about the Roma issue” (*Sme*, November 13, 2001).

Political parties in their program manifestos hardly offered a more complex approach to addressing the problems of the Roma population – their attention was focused on decreasing the unemployment and eradicating poverty in the marginalized regions of eastern Slovakia. However, the strategies of the political parties of addressing the problems of the majority population are not intertwined with addressing some of the specific problems of the Roma minority. The ANO party in its program manifesto devoted the most attention to Roma issues out of all the political parties. The party platform contains a sub-chapter devoted to the problems of the Roma minority. ANO in its approach to Roma issues starts out from a premise that the inability or refusal to tackle the problems the Roma face poses a threat to the society as a whole. ANO vows to push through a new approach to the issue comprising the following steps:

- Centralization of resources earmarked to address to the Roma problems.
- Establishment of a center in Eastern Slovakia tasked with addressing problems the Roma face.
- Establishment of the so-called state-missionary activities regulated by legislative norms and that would employ university graduates (psychologists and social workers).

In comparison to other political parties, the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK), has devoted greater attention to addressing the Roma issue in its party platform documents. SMK has vowed to support such programs and activities that would be based on active participation of the Roma. The party has also come up with a specific program involving the training of Roma assistants. These, upon their return to the community should assist the Roma in “helping to organize themselves using their own means”.

The Social-Democratic Alternative (SDA) has addressed the issue only marginally in the portion of its program devoted to social policies. Furthermore, in its program manifesto, SDA states that it considers it of utmost importance to subject to analysis all legislative norms with possible impact in the social are prior to the vote in the Parliament with specific focus on their impact on the level of poverty and possible negative effects on different social groups (women, Roma, young people, senior citizens, the unemployed, etc.)

In the programs of some political parties, such as HZDS, SNS and SDKÚ, there was no mention about the Roma or of the problems this minority faces. Despite this fact, in portions of their party programs devoted to social policies, we can identify proposals that would, to a great extent, affect the Roma minority. For example, HZDS proposed to put into practice measures against “non-conforming groups of citizens” in the form of in-kind transfers instead of monetary-based social assistance. Such approach would be in the competences of institutions of local and state administrations. Similarly, the Slovak National Party (SNS) declared that it would support the allocation of welfare benefits in material form for individuals who are incapable or unwilling to adequately utilize the financial transfers. SDKÚ, in its election program vowed to adopt measures that would put a stop to the misuse of child support funds; would support their allocation on an in-kind basis, in more frequent intervals, or if necessary would condition the social assistance transfers by the fulfillment of other obligations (school attendance etc.).

Perhaps the most repressive approach to addressing the problems of the Roma was proposed by Smer party in its program manifesto. In the portion of the program titled order in unemployment and the social

sphere it states the following: “Smer is ready by employing economic and social policies and through specifically focused health education and qualified social work to actively influence the irresponsible growth of the Roma population that is caused by unwise state policies which support large families and do not expect the accountability of the parents for the quality and standard of life of their children in return.”

In the program manifestos of political parties that had a good chance of succeeding in the parliamentary elections in 2002, the approach to Roma problems has represented only a marginal portion. However, the positive trend from prior to 1998 elections has continued and is marked by a shift from general declarations of political parties on the need of finding solutions to the problems at hand, toward proposing specific measures. Based on their approach to the problems of the Roma, the political parties could be classified into two basic categories. The first category includes ANO and SMK, which in their programs have presented intent to implement certain innovative approaches (Roma assistants, state missionary policies). The other category includes political parties that have favored an approach marked by adopting restrictive measures in the area of social policies, but above-all in the area of social welfare transfers. We can include HZDS, SNS, and SDKÚ, and especially Smer party in this latter category. In the program of the Christian Democratic Party (KDH), there is no mention of Roma issue.

THE LEGAL STATUTE (COMPARISON OF STATUTES ADOPTED BY RESOLUTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT SINCE 1999)

INTRODUCTION – THE SITUATION THAT HAS RESULTED IN ADOPTION OF THE STATUTES

Based on the resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic # 127/1999, and effective March 1, 1999, Vincent Danihel has been confirmed in the post of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing the Problems of the Roma Minority (from hereafter referred to as “Plenipotentiary”). Based on this resolution, the Government has tasked the Minister of Labor, Social Affairs and Family to allocate four persons for operations of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary, including material and financial resources and to transfer these to the Office of the Government. Thus, an independent Office of the Plenipotentiary with competences to address the problems facing the Roma minority was formed. A Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary was founded at the Office of the Government to assist in the duties of the Plenipotentiary and the expenditures associated with its activities were covered from the budget of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic.

THE STATUTE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC FOR ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS OF THE ROMA MINORITY (1999)

THE STATUTE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

The status of the Plenipotentiary was delineated in the *Statute of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Addressing Problems of Roma Minority* (from hereafter referred to as *Statute* [1999]) as contained in article 1: “The Plenipotentiary proposes, coordinates and supervises the activities directed toward addressing the issues of the Roma minority and upon approval by the Government of the Slovak Republic carries out systemic measures to achieve an equal status of citizens of Roma ethnic minority within the society. Ensures that basic human rights and freedoms guaranteed by the constitution and international treaties on human rights are upheld.” (*Statute...*, 1999) The Government of the Slovak Republic appoints into office and recalls the Plenipotentiary based on a proposal by the Under-secretary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights, Minorities and Regional Development. The Plenipotentiary is answerable for his/her activities to the Government of the Slovak Republic.

THE TASKS OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

The tasks of the Plenipotentiary within the framework of *Statute* (1999) were classified within nine basic categories:

- Is responsible for inter-departmental coordination/exchanges of reports and positions regarding Roma issues intended for the Government of the Slovak Republic (it is not specified how this coordination should be carried out),
- Elaborates program proposals intended to improve the status and life of the Roma minority with focus on increasing the level of education attained, better utilization of the human and employment potential of the Roma minority, improvement in the living conditions of the Roma minority, engagement in empirical study of problems facing the Roma minority, active participation in international programs aimed at improving the situation of the Roma minority (based on these stated goals, the *Strategy of the Government* was formulated in two stages; aside from this document, however, no other specific projects were carried out by the Office; a commission was founded for the purpose of submitting projects to local administrations and non-governmental organizations),

- Organizes advising sessions for relevant institutions; formulates specific measures based on conclusions it arrives at intended to improve the situation of the Roma minority,
- Evaluates and takes positions on concepts elaborated by the central institutions of state administration, local branches of the state administration and other organizations and/or institutions active in the area of addressing the problems of the Roma minority,
- Evaluates the effectiveness of the utilization of the resources allocated from the state budget to address the problems of citizens belonging to the Roma minority,
- Formulates positions and recommendations for the Government of the Slovak Republic in the area of addressing problems of the Roma minority,
- Bi-annually submits written report on fulfilling the measures adopted at the section for addressing the problems of the Roma minority,
- If necessary, establishes advisory bodies, initiates scientific research in the area of language studies, culture and history of the Roma (*Statute...*, 1999).

EVALUATION OF THE SCOPE OF COMPETENCES ARISING FROM THE STATUTE

In the *Statute* (1999), the division of competences of the Office of the Plenipotentiary in relation to other institutions of the state administration and ministries is not clearly defined; the competences of the Plenipotentiary encompass a broad range of issues, which provides ample room for creativity and a degree of independence in the process of implementation of the tasks. However, there is an increased risk of possible abuse of competences due to the fact that there is not an effective system of control mechanisms in place.

AUDIT OF THE WORLD BANK AND RECOMMENDED CHANGES

In 2001, based on order placed by the Under-secretary of the Government for Human Rights, Minorities and Regional Development, the non-governmental organization Amrop Jenewein Group has published a study titled *Evaluation of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Solving the Problems of the Romany National Minority*. Based on its recommendations, a new statute, and organizational structure of the secretariat was adopted. Furthermore, the Government of the Slovak Republic based on resolution # 403/2001 has recalled Vincent Danihel from the post of the Plenipotentiary and by a public tender, followed by the resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic # 574/2001 from June 20, 2001 has named into office Klára Orgovánová effective July 1, 2001. On September 18, the Government of the Slovak Republic has adopted a resolution # 886/2001 regarding the *Statute of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities and Organizational Structure of the Secretariat* (from hereafter referred to as *Statute* [2001]).

THE STATUTE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC FOR ROMA COMMUNITIES (2001)

THE STATUTE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

The key change in the new *Statute* (2001) was that of the change in the name of the secretariat from “The Plenipotentiary of the Government for Addressing the Problems of Roma Minority” to “Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities”. The main reason for this change was the realization that it is pointless to have a bureau for the Roma minority because not all Roma are in need of special assistance. Furthermore, such a name for an office only supported the myth about the homogeneity of the Roma population – a myth according to which all Roma require the same approach. The focus on specific communities allows to tailor projects for specific groups of beneficiaries and

thus to address the problems they face more effectively. At the same time, it also allows for a more effective coordination in the process of implementation of projects and cooperation with individual institutions of state and local administration, but also with non-governmental organizations.

THE TASKS OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

In the *Statute* (1999) adopted by the resolution of the Government # 127/1999, one of the tasks of the Plenipotentiary was to coordinate, in close cooperation with ministries and local levels of state administration, the process of formulating background reports and official statements of the Government of the Slovak Republic regarding the issues of the Roma minority. Due to the fact that the *Statute* (1999) did not prescribe a mechanism for this process, the new *Statute* (2001) has solved this problem by establishing an Inter-departmental commission. Based on the resolution of the Government # 886/2001, “the Plenipotentiary prepares, delegates and carries out tasks in conjunction with ministries, local levels of state administration, local administration and non-governmental organizations and for this purpose establishes an Inter-departmental commission and designates the Plenipotentiary as its chair”. The *Statute* (1999) does not specifically mention non-governmental organizations. Seemingly, a realization was made that this type of organizations and their activities influence and have an important role to play in finding effective solutions to some of the problems the Roma population faces. This change is also a reaction to the recommendations of the audit conducted by the World Bank, which contained a recommendation to employ a coordinator for cooperation of activities with non-governmental organizations.

In response to these changes, the Government has tasked the ministries to delegate their representatives on the level of state secretaries or director-generals of sections to newly established Inter-departmental commission. The following ministries were included in this directive: The Ministry of Finances; Foreign Affairs; Education; Culture; Labor, Social Affairs and Family; Interior; Justice; Health; Construction and Regional Development; Economy; Environment; Agriculture; Defense; and the director of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic. Through the Inter-departmental commission, the Plenipotentiary is to inform, on a regular basis, the ministries about the activities that are directly related to or fall within their scope of competences. However, this format of inter-departmental cooperation has not been satisfactorily implemented during the course of the monitored period.

The Inter-departmental commission has held only two sessions by the time of this writing, and its make-up is to a great extent unsuited to effectively address some of the problems the Roma communities face. Director-generals of sections of the different ministries and state secretaries do not usually personally attend sessions of the commission; instead they send their delegates from the central organs of the state administration who are often not familiar with the issues at hand. Based on the evaluation of the activities of the Secretariat, recommendations were formulated to increase its human resources capacities and to establish a satellite office in Prešov. Therefore, the Government through resolution # 886/2001 has tasked the Minister of Finances to “increase the limit of the number of employees of the Office of the Government – Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, in the year 2001 by three employees,” and at the same time to free up financial resources to cover the cost establishing of a satellite office in Prešov and the salaries of the above-mentioned three other employees of the secretariat in Bratislava. In the new *Statute* (2001), a new organizational structure of the Secretariat has been formulated with clearly-defined positions within the framework of state employee posts and public administration posts (see below).

STATUTE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC FOR ROMA COMMUNITIES (2002)

STATUTE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

Based on practical knowledge and experience gained over the course of a year during which the *Statute* (2001) of the Plenipotentiary was in effect, it has become evident that certain changes would have to be made to it. One of the aims of these amendments to the statute was to increase the Office’s transparency and improve the legal status of the Plenipotentiary, his/her scope of competences and basic tenets guiding

his/her activities. The new *Statute of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities* was adopted by a resolution of the Government # 1069/2002 on September 18, 2002 (from hereafter referred to as *Statute* [2002]).

In the process of delineation of competencies of the Plenipotentiary, the submitted proposal for the *Statute* (2002) was based on the new legislative norm # 575/2001 of the legal statute, which in paragraph 2 stipulates that the Plenipotentiary of the Government is classified as an advisory body to the Government. "The Plenipotentiary is an advisory body of the Government in the area of Roma issues in the Slovak Republic and carries out systemic measures to improve the situation of this minority and facilitate their integration into the society."

In the previous *Statute* (2001), the status of the Plenipotentiary was derived from the Undersecretary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for human rights, minorities and regional development, in whose competence it was to present to the Government recommendations for appointment or recall of the Plenipotentiary. Article 2, excerpt 2 of the new *Statute* (adopted by the resolution of the Government # 1069/2002) has strengthened the position of the Plenipotentiary. "The Plenipotentiary is appointed and recalled by the Government of the Slovak Republic based on recommendations of the Prime Minister. The Plenipotentiary is for his/her performance answerable to the Government. The salary of the Plenipotentiary is set by the Government."

TASKS OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

The new *Statute* (2002) at the same time defines in a clearer way the relations between the Plenipotentiary and the Inter-departmental commission. The *Statute* (2001) has defined the Inter-departmental commission as a coordination body. A more exact definition of these relations is contained in article # 3 of the new *Statute* (2002): "The Plenipotentiary establishes the Inter-departmental commission for the affairs of Roma communities and presides over its sessions; it is answerable to the Government for its activities." The *Statute of the Inter-departmental Commission for the Affairs of Roma Communities* delineates the scope of competencies of the Inter-departmental commission, its composition, goals, guidelines of operation, rights and responsibilities of its members, as well as administering financial resources necessary for its functioning" (from hereafter referred to as *Statute of Inter-departmental Commission*). Inter-departmental Commission enjoys the status of an advisory body.

The new *Statute* (2002) clearly defines the relations of the Plenipotentiary and the institutions of the state and local administration and other organizations/institutions. The previous two *Statutes* (1999, 2001) were lacking such a clear division and definition of competences.

- The Plenipotentiary is entitled within his/her competences to request information and statements from organs of state administration, as well as from organizations and institutions that can be established by these, and cooperates with them in the course of his/her activities.
- The Plenipotentiary, in conjunction with relevant organs of state administration, is involved in the process of formulation of concepts aimed at improving the situation of the Roma communities, and provides methodological basis for directing the activities of advisors and assistants in the state administration and institutions falling under the competence of the state administration, including schools and other institutions of learning.
- The Plenipotentiary is involved in the process of formulation and implementation of programs financed by the European Union for the purposes of implementation of joint projects in accordance with international treaties, and other projects financed from abroad that directed at addressing the problems of the Roma communities in the Slovak Republic. In pursuance of this goal, the Office of the Plenipotentiary cooperates with coordinators of pre-accession programs of the European Union in the Slovak Republic and other institutions involved in this process.
- The Plenipotentiary, in the process of carrying out projects aimed at improving the situation of Roma communities cooperates with organs of local administration, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and other institutions/organizations.

Changes in the organization and allocation of administrative and material resources of the Office of the Plenipotentiary are contained in the new *Statute* (2002). The Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary is included within the organizational structure of the Office of the Government and assists closely in his/her duties. Effective April 1, 2002, all employees of the Secretariat (with the exception of two) are now classified as civil

servants and their status is thus governed by legislation #312/2001 of the legal statute on civil service, and legislative norms related to it adopted thereafter. Thus, the employees of the Secretariat are in the service of the state, or are directly employed by the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic (article 7, excerpt 2 of the resolution of the Government # 1069/2002).

Changes in the legal status of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities were made because there was need to define, in a more exact way, the competences of the Plenipotentiary, and to make adjustments in terms of organizational structure of this office and its relation with other organs of the state and local administration, which were defined in *Statute* (1999) only in a crude fashion and thus made the communication between the Plenipotentiary and other organs of state administration complicated. The position of the Plenipotentiary was gradually gaining in influence. The establishment of the Inter-departmental commission has required amendments to the official statute and the relations of the Office to other state organs (ministries). What remains to be seen, however, is to what extent the changes in the legal status have led to effective functioning of the commission (see chapter *Cooperation between the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities and State Administration*).

A grant from the World Bank aimed at bolstering the position of the Secretariat of the Office of the Plenipotentiary has made it possible to evaluate the functioning of the Secretariat in the area of personnel capacities. As a result of the evaluation, a new organizational structure was proposed. Personnel changes have required an amendment to the *Statute* (1999) and re-definition of the legal statute of employment relations, which it originally did not include.

PRIORITIES IN ADDRESSING PROBLEMS OF THE ROMA AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURES

STRATEGY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC IN ADDRESSING PROBLEMS OF THE ROMA MINORITY – STAGES I. AND II.

The priorities of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for addressing the problems of the Roma minority were delineated in two strategic documents – *Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing Problems of the Roma Ethnic Minority and a Compilation of Measures for its Implementation – Stage I*¹ and *Elaborated Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing the Problems of Roma Ethnic Minority to Complement Specific Measures for the Year 2000 – Stage II*.² Both documents capture a wide range of problems, and contain proposals of measures to be implemented by the organs of state administration. The Under-secretary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights, Minorities and Regional Development and the Plenipotentiary of the Government for addressing the problems of the Roma minority; ministries; regional and district offices were the institutions responsible for the implementation of the *Strategy of the Government*. Moreover, the network of cooperating institutions included local administration and non-governmental organizations. The ministries and regional offices were tasked with formulating and preparing the first stage of the *Strategy of the Government* and to transform the strategy into specific measures, which were then incorporated into the second phase of the *Strategy of the Government*.

THE AIMS OF THE STRATEGY

- To create conditions for the full realization and recognition of the human rights of ethnic minorities.
- To find systemic solutions to problems of the Roma minority.
- Addressing the problems of the Roma minority is considered to be of importance to the whole society.
- To focus on critical areas, such as unemployment, housing, healthcare, social issues, education and rights.

IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS

Human Rights

- Approach to the Roma in Slovakia whereby they are disadvantaged and discriminated against based on their ethnic differences and historical and social conditions.
- Social distancing by the majority population in regards to certain aspects of life of this ethnic minority.
- Implementation of protection of human rights and rights of persons belonging to ethnic minorities is not satisfactory, especially when it comes to citizens of Roma ethnicity.
- The state approached aspects of life of the Roma minority and its co-existence with the majority in an inconsistent manner, and without relying on an adequate information and data.
- Institutions, such as the Police, prosecutor's office and public administration have not always approached the mediation of conflicts involving the Roma minority and the majority population in an objective manner, without prejudices. These are some of the underlying reasons for the distrust of the Roma toward institutions of the public administration, the law enforcement authorities, as well as the judiciary.

¹ The Document was approved at the session of the Government of the Slovak Republic on September 27, 1999.

² Adopted by the Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic # 294/2000 on May 3, 2000.

Upbringing and Education

- It is often the case that adult Roma do not complete even primary education. These unfavorable statistics create a group of citizens who are not capable of fully and actively defend themselves and take advantage of their rights, meet their obligations and independently solve problems, such as unemployment, housing, etc.
- A high occurrence of attendance of special schools by the Roma, coupled with low levels of attendance of secondary and university education represent problems that will have a negative impact on the position of young Roma within the Slovak society.

Language and Culture

- Often ignored and overlooked facets of Roma life.
- The policies of subsidies have prevented a broader development of language and culture.

Un/employment

- High degree of unemployment of the Roma population extols a financial burden on the state and leads the increase in crime, decline of the social situation, drug addiction, prostitution, and disruption of family bonds, etc.
- The unwillingness of the institutions in charge to address the extremely high unemployment of the Roma often justified by the institutions as going against a “civic principle” of equal approach to all citizens.
- The worse state of health of the Roma population, compared to other groups, and low level of qualifications decrease their chances of finding employment; in light of the demands for jobs on the labor market and their slow creation makes it even more difficult for this social group to find employment.
- Disinterest of the employers to hire the Roma, often rooted in their negative experiences, such as lower or complete lack of work ethic of members of this group of population caused by long-term unemployment and other factors.

Housing

- Majority of dwellings in Roma settlements do not meet the proscribed criteria and health codes; they are often constructed by their inhabitants’ own efforts, often without a building permit and without settling the ownership rights to the land on which they are constructed.
- By non-observance of basis requirements and guidelines during the construction, such as the “construction line,” and the absence of street lighting and road infrastructure complicates the access to ambulances, fire engines, as well as refuses removal services.

Social Situation

- The Roma minority is not capable, by its own efforts and without the assistance of the majority population to improve its social status. At the same time, the majority population is not willing or capable to assist the Roma in becoming fully emancipated citizens of this country with equal opportunities.

The Health Situation

- The average state of health of the Roma population, including the children is much worse than the average state of health of the majority population.
- The following factors are affecting the state of health of the Roma population: low level of education and social awareness of the Roma, low standard of housing and personal hygiene, polluted and devastated environment, lack of availability of drinking water meeting the standard health criteria, drug abuse, alcohol use, and smoking.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Human Rights

- Barring discrimination of the Roma by organs of public administration by means of educating the employees at public and local administration, members of the judiciary and police about racism and effective handling of conflict situations,

- support of activities of non-governmental organizations directed towards helping the Roma population through grants involving projects targeting social and educational sphere,
- continue to foster legal awareness within the society in the area of human rights and rights of persons belonging to ethnic minorities.

Upbringing and Education

- Securing conditions for training five-year-old Roma children in pre-school facilities,
- upbringing and education should be of multi-cultural nature and promote tolerance,
- establishment of so-called zero-level education classes with Roma language as a support tool in the education process,
- review of the effectiveness of the role of teacher assistants on the level of elementary schools and level of primary education,
- instituting out-of-school activities,
- replacing the system of assigning Roma children to special classes by a system of flexible transition by a way of “equalization” classes with less pupils at the primary level of education,
- support of education of adult-age Roma.

Language and Culture

- Protection and support of development of Roma language and culture,
- securing suitable conditions at institutions of higher learning in Nitra and Prešov for cultivation, preservation and development of the Roma language,
- support for research of culture and history of the Roma,
- research of Roma language,
- support of projects with mass media coverage about the Roma and intended for the Roma.

Un/employment

- Securing adequate conditions to provide the citizens of Roma ethnicity with equal access the labor market,
- securing such conditions in the process of public procurement that would allow for Roma participation on those projects that they can successfully participate in,
- increasing the level of education attained by unemployed Roma by providing re-qualifications trainings,
- support for public service projects.

Housing

- Making the assistance from the State Fund for the Development of Housing and Mortgages available to Roma families,
- carrying out projects aimed at achieving complex re-socialization of the Roma community living in settlements targeting, aside from the problems associated with the housing situation, also the area of upbringing and education, employment, counseling, etc.
- continuing in the process of fulfilling the aims of the resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic # 335/2001 regarding the proposal for the construction of the so-called community houses of different standard for those Roma who are in a situation of economic hardship; making improvements in Roma settlements (infrastructure, etc.).

Social Area

- Make sure that the social workers active in the field are responsible for addressing the problems of the Roma minority in the particular region falling within their area of operations,
- social policies of the state should provide stimulus to the socio-economic development of the society – it should not hinder it; it should motivate individuals to work and to appeal to their sense of solidarity; it should prevent social exclusion of a portion of the society.

The Health Situation

- Educational activities and training to improve the hygiene, health awareness and prevention,
- provision of conditions to improve the quality of food handling and consumption practices.

EVALUATION OF STRATEGY

To start, it is necessary to highlight the ambition of the Government to approach the accumulated problems the Roma minority faces and to do so at the level of individual ministries and regional state administration. This ambition, outlined in the *Strategy of the Government* is often confronted with several obstacles in the process of its implementation, problems. These are embedded in the document itself.

Strategy of the Government (see scheme 1) is of considerable breadth – this, however, detracts from its focus. What it is missing are clearly formulated solutions. It instead contains non-specific political declarations; the structure of the document makes it difficult to identify the priorities and the hierarchy of problems and the approaches the Government, individual ministries and the state administration intend to take on these issues. Keeping in mind the close interconnectedness of individual problems of the Roma population in Slovakia, it is necessary to say that the *Strategy of the Government* is missing a complex approach. It seems that this shortcoming in this strategic material is the price for an approach focusing on specific areas. The *Strategy of the Government* comes across rather as an operative plan for addressing existing problems without defining clearly the desired state of affairs or discussing the feasibility of implementing the plan by the proposed measures.

In the significant portion of the provisions contained in the *Strategy of the Government* it becomes apparent that the organs of the state administration and the Roma carry the brunt of responsibilities for addressing the identified problems. This document is omitting the discussion of the inter-racial relations in Slovakia – above all, the relations between the members of the Roma minority and the majority population. The target group of the *Strategy of the Government*, as well as all programs and proposed approaches to addressing the problems the Roma minority faces should involve the Roma, as well as the members of the majority population.

Despite the fact that the *Strategy of the Government* mentions bodies of the regional branches of state administration as those responsible for the implementation of measures, it represents a concept of nationwide, approach to problems the Roma face. It fails to take into account regional variations of problems that need to be addressed on the regional and local level.

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of the *Strategy of the Government* is that it approaches the Roma as a homogeneous group. The *Strategy of the Government* does not take into account the internal organization of this minority, the social layers, specific characteristics of communities living in urban and rural environments, the extent of social or geographical segregation, or the level of integration of the Roma minority in Slovakia.

Moreover, in light of the mentioned shortcomings, local branches of state administration – namely district and municipal offices, which have a significant role in the implementation of the *Strategy of the Government* – have expressed reservations of certain provisions of the strategy – specifically regarding Stage II. In their view, the strategy is too specific, while the process of its implementation is not satisfactorily elaborated, which makes it difficult to verify fully if the proscribed measures are carried out. *Strategy of the Government*, in the words of the representatives of the state administration, should contain the basic plan or strategy and the priorities including specific measures would be included in other documents listing the goals for ministries and local levels of state administration.

The elaborated *Strategy of the Government – Stage II* does not specify a very important facet of implementation – the provisions and the means of cooperation/exchange of information between district and municipal offices and the Office of the Plenipotentiary.

The representatives of the state administration who were interviewed by the authors of this report expressed doubts over whether the Strategy would be enforceable in light of the fact that it does not have the force of a law, which, in their words could lead to the lax approach in meeting its goals. At the same time, they pointed out the fact that some goals that were assigned to the ministry of the environment – such as the project of overview of Roma settlements with focus on the number of Roma settlements constructed without a building permit and required infrastructure were never carried out despite the fact that the Secretariat has repeatedly asked the ministry to do so.

RESEARCH OF THE WORLD BANK

On the verge of years 1999 and 2000, the World Bank has carried out a research titled *Poverty and Welfare of the Roma in the Slovak Republic*. It has highlighted the fact that “the Roma in Slovakia have become the victims that were affected the hardest by the process of transformation from a planned economy to a market economy. The Roma are poorer than any other group of the population and are worse of than any other social group in terms of indicators such as the level of education attained, health situation, housing, in terms of access and opportunities on the labor market and within the civil society.” (*Poverty and Welfare...*, 2002, p. iv)

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

In contrast to other countries of central and eastern Europe, a significant portion of the Roma in Slovakia live in settlements (approximately one quarter) and on peripheries of towns and villages.

The settlements differ based on geographic location and the degree of segregation.

The number of Roma living in the settlements has been increasing during the past decade due to the unavailability of affordable housing of standard quality.

The poverty of the Roma is closely related to four basic factors:

- Overall economic situation in the region,
- size and density of the Roma population in the settlement,
- the proportion of Roma population in the settlement,
- the degree of geographical segregation or integration of the settlement and its distance from the nearest village or town.

In individual regions, the level of poverty is closely related to the degree of integration and segregation of minorities, respectively. Settlements with the greatest degree of segregation are at the same time the most economically and socially underdeveloped ones.

- The greatest single problem in the most underdeveloped settlements is the nutrition of the children. Some Roma pupils do not attend lunches in school cafeterias because their parents cannot afford it.
- The housing conditions are worst in the most segregated settlements, where the situation is marked by a lack of access to electricity, water and gas. The plots of land and houses which the Roma inhabit are not in their ownership and are often constructed illegally – a factor that complicates the situation of the local administration and its efforts to build the basic infrastructure in these settlements.
- The health situation of the Roma is on average worse than that of the majority population. There are cases of contagious diseases associated with inadequate living conditions, as well as an ever-present risk of the outbreak of epidemics, which have been previously eradicated in the majority population. The general approach of the Roma to healthcare is negatively influenced by the geographical remoteness of the settlements from urban areas, insufficient communication with the healthcare providers and discrimination.
- There is a greater chance for Roma children to be transferred to the so-called special schools for children who are mentally and physically underdeveloped, which has the effect of limiting the future opportunities of these children in terms of attaining an institution of higher level of education and consequently, on the labor market.
- The low level of education of the Roma puts them in a disadvantageous situation on the labor market and contributes to the existence of other correlating factors of poverty.
- The position of the Roma has changed dramatically during the transformation process in terms of increase in unemployment, and the resulting resignation and passivity. The levels of long-term unemployment are very high, specifically among the Roma population. Many Roma find employment in the so-called gray economy, rather than on the labor market. Discrimination of Roma often plays a role in the process of their application for employment.
- The long-term unemployed Roma living in the poorer segregated settlements are existentially dependent on the social welfare system.
- Social exclusion and discrimination of the Roma within the society has a negative effect on their approach to, and perception of job opportunities, education and public services.

- The negative perception of the Roma due to their declining social status, growing unemployment and dependence on social welfare payments continues to be a problem and is becoming worse. Negative stereotypes are also the product of the geographic isolation of the Roma and the increasingly limited contact between the Roma and the non-Roma populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improving the housing conditions, namely access to infrastructure and public services (electricity, sewage, gas, running water etc.). Clarification of ownership rights regarding the plots of land on which the settlements are built.
- Support of policies of employment of the Roma and decrease in discrimination in the process of employment application by a way of improving anti-discrimination legislature, decreasing the tax burden and other expenditures incurred by the employers.
- Removing the barriers preventing Roma children from beginning and successfully completing their school attendance, improving pre-school attendance and making access to secondary education easier; limiting to minimum the practice of transferring Roma children to special schools.
- Improving mobile healthcare, increasing the awareness of the Roma about health risks and prevention.
- Implementation of information campaigns, multi-cultural approach to education and training of public officials; elimination of social exclusion.

PRIORITIES OF THE OFFICE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC FOR ROMA COMMUNITIES

Shortly after assuming the post of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, on July 1, 2001, Klára Orgovánová has outlined four basic priorities, which were to serve as guidelines for approach to the problems of the Roma minority by the Office of the Plenipotentiary, ministries, district and municipal offices. In the process of comparison of the basic findings and recommendations that were outlined in the research project of the World Bank (see scheme 2) on one hand, and the set priorities (see scheme 3) on the other, we can conclude that the findings of the above-mentioned research have provided the necessary information platform for re-defining these priorities.

It is necessary to highlight the fact that the approach in setting the priorities of addressing the situation of Roma communities makes good sense and thus the priorities themselves, as well as their structure have addressed the deficits of the *Strategy of the Government*. The priorities of the Plenipotentiary do to some extent build on the *Strategy of the Government*, but differ from it in that they form a functional framework of addressing the problems the Roma face. Yet another improvement was made in the form of narrowing down the focus to the most pressing problems, which if successfully addressed would have a multiplier effect and lead to improvements in other areas.

PRIORITY # 1: COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR ROMA SETTLEMENTS

Background

- The level of poverty in Slovakia is determined by two basic factors: the development of the region (its economic situation, structure of employment, structure of education, type of infrastructure) and related issues, such as the level of integration of the Roma community or its segregation. The general rule is the greater the segregation of the Roma community, the greater the level of poverty.
- Attempts at integration or assimilation of communities are not successful due to the fact that people in these communities live for protracted periods in segregation and are separated from the majority population geographically. The trend of the past couple of years has been the construction of special schools or classes, shops, even churches intended solely for the Roma.

- Geographically and socially isolated urban areas inhabited predominantly by Roma who do not pay rent are appearing. These areas are characterized by various phenomena of social pathology, represent a health hazard and are marked by gradually deteriorating infrastructure.
- The concentration of the Roma in these areas has the effect of “mixing” of the Roma with a relatively favorable economic and social status with those of lower status. The result is the decline in the living standard of all of the inhabitants within that particular area, as well as a departure from the “non-Roma” models of living and practices that were picked up from the majority population.
- After 1999, there has been a rapid increase in the number of Roma settlements caused by migration of Roma population from rural to urban areas due to the greater availability of more cost-effective housing.
- Shacks in Roma settlements constructed from wood, clay, sheet metal, or a combination of these materials, are often constructed by self-help, without a building permit and often with disregard of ownership rights to the land on which they are built.
- No matter what the good intent of policies aimed to address the situation in the segregated Roma community, if it does not include also activities aimed at opening up the closed system, is bound to fail and will result only in the preservation of the status quo.

Proposed Solutions

- It is necessary that the internal diversity of the Roma community be one of the main considerations when individual programs aimed at districts with Roma settlements are formulated; these programs have to address the unfavorable social conditions of the Roma minority.
- Provide the settlements with the necessary material resources; provide means of communication with the “mother” district; construct necessary technical infrastructure.
- Decrease the level of, and gradually eliminate the phenomenon of social segregation.
- Influence the public opinion of the majority population toward the Roma and secure conditions for their gradual integration into the district.
- Address the housing needs, and engage in activities, such as construction of infrastructure, support of education, re-qualification and increasing the employment, support of entrepreneurial projects in select settlements, and social work in settlements.
- Long-term effective cooperation between Roma and non-Roma inhabitants in select districts through common activities and planning aimed at developing the district; decrease the migration from district.

The above-mentioned priority for addressing the problems the Roma face is based on the recommendations of the World Bank – i.e. that to eradicate the poverty of the Roma, it is necessary to focus on the situation in the segregated Roma settlements.

To implement this priority, three basic rules were established. They included amenability to modeling, complexity, and partnership.

“Amenability to modeling” means carrying out a pilot project in a specific region, in order to evaluate its feasibility and applicability in terms of human resources necessary for its implementation. Thus, the pilot project will serve to identify the shortcomings and will offer valuable knowledge for its implementation on a broader scale. The establishment of these rules allows for a transparent review of activities, as well as the contributions of all parties participating in the project.

“Complexity” means complex approach to the situation in a specific community (not only in relation to Roma, but also to non-Roma population). Thus, the project should include educational activities, activities aimed at increasing employment, improving the quality of life, dismantling stereotypes, etc. Adherence to this rule makes the project of comprehensive development of Roma settlements in terms of its focus, the scope of activities, and results achieved into a priority that supercedes all others (see scheme 3).

“Priority-based approach” – the third rule means partnership of institutions/organizations involved in the process of implementation of measures and/or projects. The complexity of the project requires coordination and support of all parties involved at the level of central, as well as local administration.

The breadth of the project, and the sheer number of activities, as well as a tendency of the local administration, as well as the local population toward reluctance in the process of their implementation represents a risk factor in the process – this is an important factor that was also acknowledged by the Office of the

Plenipotentiary. A successful implementation is preconditioned by effective coordination at the level of the Secretariat, but also on the level of the specific location where the project/measures are to be implemented. This requires highly qualified personnel that will participate in the process of implementation of the program. Of equal importance is also media coverage of the given project whose aim should be to attract the attention of potential partners and involve them in future projects.

PRIORITY # 2: HOUSING

Background

- On the verge of the third millennium, there are settlements in Slovakia lacking basic amenities such as drinking water, sewage system, distribution of electricity or road infrastructure.

Proposed Solutions

- To assist Roma families residing in the settlements in terms of housing and in the process of gradually raising its standards.

Implementation

The program of assistance in construction of municipal rental apartments of a different standard intended for citizens in economic hardship and assistance in providing technical infrastructure in the Roma settlements includes the following steps:

- cooperation with the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development,
- financing of housing and technical infrastructure in Roma settlements with the portion of financial resources amounting to 2.47 billion Sk allocated for the construction of municipal rental apartments,
- the municipality can fundraise upwards of 80% of the purchase price of the apartment; the remaining 20% of the price (84,000 Sk) will be covered by the future tenant by a way of his/her work contribution.

Above-all, it is necessary to underline the close interconnectedness of this priority with priority # 1. The issue of quality of housing and construction of the necessary infrastructure are the basic pre-requisite for the further development of Roma settlements. A parallel aim of this priority is to change the existing social and geographical segregation of the Roma communities in Slovakia by constructing municipal rental apartments of different standard within the municipalities, but also by making efforts to locate housing units directly in areas inhabited by the majority population.

This priority has a significant multiplier effect because as a part of its implementation, it also addresses the unemployment of the Roma (20% of the expenses of the construction of the apartment will be covered by the participation of the future tenant in the process of construction). Furthermore, it could be beneficial in dismantling prejudices and stereotypes of the majority population toward the Roma, and lead to the improvement of the overall health situation of the Roma population.

Activities formulated within this priority establish a suitable platform for a fruitful cooperation between central, regional, and local levels of administration.

However, there have been certain problems encountered in the process of implementation of this priority. They include the lack of interest in participation in this kind of projects, specifically in locations that are inhabited by the most under-developed Roma communities. Other reasons given for not implementing this priority included the following:

- unavailability of financial resources for the preparatory steps needed prior to the construction, namely the project documentation,
- insufficient level of expertise of the employees of the local administration who are tasked with preparation of documents for the construction, and especially, the documents necessary for the issuance of building permits and organizing public tenders for the construction company,
- unavailability of plots of land suitable for the construction of apartments for the Roma community,
- unwillingness of the mayors to go through with the construction.

Despite the generous financial support of the Government (covering 80% of the expenses) in many localities, the project has met with disapproval; pressure by the majority population on mayors and representatives of the municipal or regional offices was applied by the local population not to participate in projects. Furthermore, the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government has also organized expert seminars on housing policies tailored for the Roma population intended for 336 mayors and highest-level representatives of districts and issued a document titled *Methodological Directives for the Employees of the Administration* outlining the rules and procedures for increasing the involvement of the Roma population in the process of construction of housing units and the related technical infrastructure.

The Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities has also submitted to the cabinet a proposal for the utilization of the resources of the state budget, in accordance with legislative norm # 586/2001 on the state budget for the year 2002 of the chapter *General Accounting Report – Reserve for Projects Directed Toward Addressing Problems of the Roma Community* on June 6, 2002 (resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic # 627/2002), and on July 17, 2002 (resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic # 789/2002). The mentioned resolutions included also support projects for the construction of 919 flats. 9,647,500 Sk was earmarked by the Government of the Slovak Republic for this purpose.

Table 1
Housing construction projects

Regional office	Number of flats	Total amount
Banská Bystrica	16 units	35,000 Sk
Valkovňa – 10 units		Lenártovce – 6 units
Prešov	654 housing units	7,643,500 Sk
Kamenná Poruba – 20 units	Žalobín – 7 units	
Hanušovce n/Topľou – 10 units	Jastrabie n/Topľou – units	
Večec – 15 units	Čičava – 35 units	
Skrabské – 4 units	Rudlov – 20 units	
Vyšný Žipov – 6units	Zamutov – 24 units	
Bukovce – 10 units	Zborov – 10 units	
Sveržov – 12 units	Výborná – 37 units	
Spišské Podhradie – 10 units	Spišský Štvrtok – 36 units	
Krivany – 15 units	Chmiňany – 25 units	
Jarovnice – 16 units	Jarovnice – 16 units	
Stročín – 10 units	Stráne pod Tatrami – 32 units	
Hlinné – 30 units	Ihľany – 20 units	
Rakúsy – 55 units	Svidník – 96 units	
Ostrovany – 57 units	Lubica – 18 units	
Jurské – 10 units	Holumnica – 21 units	
Sečovská Polianka – 16 units	Krásny Brod – 4 units	
Košice	249	1,869,000 Sk
Žehra – 41 units		Nálepkovo – 28 units
Michalovce – 40 units		Bystrany – 40 units
Veľká Ida – 100 units		

Source: www.government.gov/orgovanova.

Table 2**Regions and towns/cities in the Slovak Republic, which have applied for financial assistance**

Regional office	Number of flats	Financial coverage requested
Banská Bystrica	23 units	270,000 Sk
Polomka – 10 units		Šíd 13 units
Žilina	12 units	99,000 Sk
Liptovský Mikuláš – 12 units		
Prešov	259 units	1,897,000 Sk
Zbudské Dlhé – 24 units	Petrová – 18 units	
Nižný Komárnik – 10 units	Giraltovce – 28 units	
Torysa – 35 units	Rokytov – 10 units	
Svinia – 90 units	Varadka – 12 units	
Bardejov – 32 units		

Source: www.government.gov/orgovanova.

PRIORITY # 3: EDUCATION

Proposed Approach

- Secure that the new law on education contains the provisions for specific preventive measures, as well as competences for intervention into the curriculum and organizational structure of institutions of learning.
- Participate in the process of creation a suitable environment for education purposes starting with pre-school education, to improve the performance of students when they enter primary level education.
- Support various forms of pre-school programs and make these available not only to children, but also for adults who could attend classes and training sessions to prepare them for parenthood, even before the child is born.
- Offering the possibility of re-integration of pupils attending special primary education classes into a regular primary education. Such re-integration would be based on results achieved and utilize methods aimed at fostering the individual development of pupils.
- Utilize the infrastructure of existing schools for educational activities for children, the youth and adults during afternoons and weekends.
- Utilize the potential of the Roma public and involve them in the educational process and extra-curricular activities.
- Implement and support educational methods with focus on promoting multi-cultural values, elimination of stereotypes in the interaction between pupils, teachers and parents; adopt a pupil-focused approach in the education process.
- Make amendments to the existing legislation and re-classify the position of teacher's assistants to a category of "pedagogical employee" and utilize this position as a tool for elimination of initial language and social barriers of the Roma pupils at the first level of primary education.
- Finance the construction of National Center for Roma Education from Phare funds, as a guarantee of the improvement of quality and the overall situation in the area of education of the Roma minority.

An important sign of progress is the fact that in the process of elaboration of priorities in the area of education, various inputs were taken into considerations. These included recommendations of international institutions,³ documents of the Ministry of Education⁴ and recommendations of research projects carried out by non-governmental organizations⁵. As well as in the case of the above-mentioned priorities, the priority of education is closely interconnected with the *Comprehensive Development Programme for Roma Settlements* (priority

#1). The proposed approaches to implementation of the priority in education are systemic and take into account the broader context of inter-related issues. They represent a collection of intervention and preventive measures. The multiplier effect of their successful implementation would be in addressing the persistent problem of segregation on ethnic basis in the system of education. Furthermore, the adoption of measures intended for improving the chances for success of Roma pupils in Slovakia's education system, is a pre-requisite for their success of on the labor market and could lead to decrease in the alarming level of unemployment of the Roma.

Effective implementation of this particular priority (mainly in the area of development of pre-school programs intended for Roma children, as well as the institution of teacher's assistants) also includes implementing of measures elaborated in priority # 4 – re-codification of the Roma language.

PRIORITY # 4.: ROMA LANGUAGE

Background

- Roma language represents one of the most important elements forming the sense of identity of the Roma minority.
- The diversity and the number of dialects of the Roma language makes its usage complicated, especially in the education process.
- In light of pan-European trends to preserve and develop languages of minorities, the approach has taken root, whereby each language is unique and is part of a cultural heritage that should be protected and cultivated.
- Attempts at producing written text in the Roma language, such as those elaborated by the linguistic commission of the Council of Gypsies – Roma for Slovak-based Roma Language (Zväz Cigánov – Rómov pre slovenskú Rómčinu) are not having much success in the community used to communicating only in the spoken form of the language.

Proposed Solutions

- The Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities has tasked a group of experts to establish a commission for re-codifying of the Roma language.

Implementation

- The established working group is comprised of the following members:
 - Milena Hübschmanová – Charles University, Prague, Department of Indian Studies,
 - Anna Rácová – Slovak Academy of Sciences, Department of Oriental Studies, an expert on Roma,
 - Anna Koptová – Foundation Dobrá rómska víla Kesaj (Good Fairy Kesaj), translator, newspaper writer,
 - Ingrid Lukáčová – Art High School, Košice, teacher of Roma language,
 - Emil Samko – specialist assistant at the Department of Roma Culture, Faculty of Social Sciences of the Constantine the Philosopher University (UKF FSV KRK) Nitra,
 - Gejza Adam – director SUŠ, Košice,
 - Dezider Banga – publisher, book and newspaper writer,
 - František Godla – high school principal, translator and publicist writing in the Roma language,
 - Viliam Zeman – Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government, writer, translator, specialist assistant UKF FSV KRK Nitra.

³ *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, documents on human rights and basic freedoms adopted at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, a document from a Copenhagen meeting of KBSE, adopted on June 29th, 1990; Framework Agreement of the Council of Europe on the Protection of Ethnic Minorities, recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe No. 1203/1993 on Roma in Europe; recommendation of the Council of Ministers of the member countries regarding the education of Roma children in Europe.

⁴ *The Proposal of a New Education Law* (2002); working materials of the ministry of education on the concept of education of Roma children, as well as materials on the re-integration of Roma pupils from socially- and educationally- unfavorable conditions of special schools into regular schools.

⁵ Research project *Acceleration of the Level of Success of Roma Pupils* carried out by School wide open foundation, methodological handbooks of the Step by Step program.

- The language commission has recommended that eastern Slovak dialect be used as the basis for codification of the Roma language, which is used by approximately by 85% of the Roma in Slovakia.
- The University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Roma Culture was put in charge of oversight of the preparatory stages of the codification of the Roma language.
- The rules of the grammar of the Roma language will be published. The basis for this publication will be a textbook based on the Slovak version of the Roma language *Romani čhib* by Helena Šebková, as well as a guide to the textbook of the Slovak version of Roma language, which also includes a basic dictionary.

The project of re-codification of the Roma language differs from the other priorities of the Plenipotentiary, since it is not directly related to addressing the pressing problems of the segregated settlements and the social situation of the Roma population. Indirectly, however, the re-codified Roma language can serve as an effective tool in the implementation of the project of teachers' assistants at the level of primary education, and at the same time can contribute to preservation and stimulate a more dynamic development of the Roma culture. The Roma language and its usage are also grounded in the applicable legislation and international conventions ratified by the Slovak Republic. These include the following:

- according to the constitution of the Slovak Republic, citizens "belonging to ethnic minorities have a right to education in their native language,"
- according to law on the usage of languages of ethnic minorities adopted by the National Council of the Slovak Republic on July 11, 1999, the Roma language is classified as an minority language,
- based on the law on minority languages, Roma have a right to dual-language signs, as well as to communicate with the representatives of the state administration in their mother tongue in 52 districts (based on 2001 census), in which the Roma community represents more than 20% of the population,
- the *European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages* ratified by the Slovak Republic guarantees the Roma broad scope of rights in the area of language usage.

In the majority population, within the state administration, as well as in expert circles, there are mixed reactions to the usage of Roma language, either in the education process or in the official communication with the organs of state administration:

- According to the Under-secretary of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights and Regional Development Pál Csáky, the Roma language should be used on such a level and in such regions in which it is suitable; if a language is not used in school textbooks and is not used in formulation of laws, it should not be used in official contact.
- The Roma do not demand that the law on usage of languages of ethnic minorities be implemented. There are several reasons for this: They are not familiar with the law, they generally feel that such laws are not necessary, and finally, because the written form of the Roma language is unfamiliar to them.
- The majority population is not ready to use the Roma language in official communication.
- The education system is not prepared to implement the Roma language into the educational process.
- According to the survey conducted in 1994 by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, in 1994, only 11% of the Roma respondents opined that all subjects on the level of primary education should be taught in the Roma language; 33% would support the usage of Roma language only in the education of some subjects; 45% of respondents were of the opinion that no subjects should be taught in the Roma language. The support among the Roma for the usage of Roma language in the education process in secondary and university education is even lower.

There are also advantages to the usage of the Roma language. These include the following:

- existence of language rights of the Roma opens up possibilities for further development of the Roma identity,
- arguments in favor of the usage if the Roma language include better results achieved in the education process at the lower levels through bilingual method of education.

BUILDING OF THE SECRETARIAT

PERIOD FROM MARCH 1999 TO JUNE 2001

On November 3, 1998 the Government of the Slovak Republic issued a memorandum in which it expressed preparedness to take necessary steps to renew the trust of all ethnic groups in all state institutions, which should offer assistance and protect the rights of citizens of the Slovak Republic. A post of Under-secretary of Government for Human Rights, Minorities, and Regional Development. Furthermore, the Governmental Council for Minorities and Ethnic Groups – an advisory and coordination body of the Government for state policies toward minorities was established.

On February 10, 1999, based on resolution # 127/1999, effective March 1, 1999 the Government has appointed Vincent Danihel to the post of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing the Problems of the Roma Minority. At the same time, the Government has tasked the Minister of Labor, Social Affairs and Family with establishing the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government, including four employees, as well as allotting necessary financial and material resources to the Office of the Government for these purposes. Based on this resolution, three employees-specialists within the Secretariat were tasked to focus on the situation in the area of education, employment, and housing. These areas were listed in the *Statute* (1999) among the basic tasks under the competence of the Plenipotentiary. The resolution of the Government # 716/1999 pertaining to the proposal finalizing the composition of the Secretariat has included a directive to hire three employees of the Office of the Strategy of Development of Society, Science, and Technology. However, only one specialist on the area of social affairs from the above-mentioned institution was actually appointed. Furthermore, two additional administrative employees were hired; two additional employees joined the Office during the year 2000. The *Statute* (1999) did not include the organizational structure of the Secretariat – no concept of this structure existed at this time; the tasks and competences of individual employees were not clearly delineated, and the hierarchy of individual employees within the system was missing.

The tentative structure of the Secretariat that did exist is described in Scheme 4 (see the *Addendum*).

The classification of employees into separate categories was based on the level of formal education attained and relevant experience in a specific area of specialization. This classification served for determining the level of salaries of individual employees. The highest-salaried employees included specialized advisors (classified by degree I. and II of specialization); next level down included specialized officials, followed by administrative employees. A level of specialization II represented in the Office was formally categorized – this post was held by an employee who was an interpreter of the Plenipotentiary. This post was of importance since the Plenipotentiary did not speak the English language, and thus would not be able to go on foreign trips and communicate with representatives of foreign organizations.

Since the post of the director of the Secretariat was not established within the organizational structure, this post was held by the specialist advisor for education. Thus, the employee at this post was included in the higher salary category.

The Plenipotentiary of the Government, Vincent Danihel has defined as a main priority of his Office the formulation of *Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing e Problems of the Roma Minority - Stage I. and II.* The employees of the Secretariat were involved in the process of the formulation of this strategy, and contributed to it on their knowledge and experiences in their particular area of expertise, such as education, employment, housing, social affairs.

Yet another focus of the activities of the Office was the management of the process of formulation and evaluation of individual projects. For this purpose, finances were allotted on a yearly basis by law adopted by the National Council of the Slovak Republic within the chapter on *General Accounting Report – Reserve for Projects Aimed at Addressing Problems of the Roma Minority and Social and Cultural Needs of the Roma Community* (the Ministry of Finances was put in charge of its administration). Non-governmental organizations, as well as offices of local administration were eligible to apply for funding for projects from this fund. Furthermore, the Secretariat has elaborated a document titled *Methodological Directives for the Process of Application for State Budget Funding of Projects Aimed at Addressing Problems of the Roma Minority*. At the same time, a commission for selection, approval and implementation of projects aimed at addressing problems of the Roma community was established and was to serve as an advisory body to the Plenipotentiary.

Despite efforts to increase the transparency of the selection and evaluation process, only a handful of funds from state budget were allocated in a way that actually contributed to finding solutions to problems of the Roma minority. Generally speaking, the final effect of these projects was not of significance. The

overview of the activities of the Secretariat is included in the *Proposal of the Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic on*

1. *Information on the Utilization of Funds of the State Budget Allocated for the Implementation of Projects Aimed at Addressing the Problems of the Roma Minority for the Year 1999 and*
2. *Information on Activities of the Government of the Slovak Republic, Undersecretary of the Government, Plenipotentiary of the Government and Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government in the area of Addressing Problems of the Roma Minority.*

This report on activities contains materials submitted to the cabinet, official positions, expert evaluations, information about meetings with various organizations, consultation sessions, business trips, and projects. However, the report only provides a basic framework of the activities that were carried out – it does not go into detail and list all the activities that were carried out, nor does it list the employees of the Secretariat who participated in them. The activities are listed and quantified (for example: business trips in the Slovak Republic – 397; foreign trips – 39). However, there is no evaluation of these activities or their impact on target areas.

According to the *Proposal of the Resolution...*, (2000): “In light of the strong demand of various expert and organizational demands on the Plenipotentiary to address the problems of the Roma minority, it is becoming apparent that the section of the Plenipotentiary should be expanded in terms of space and personnel in such a way to be able to meet all the expectations that are placed on it. A key requirement for meeting all the outlined goals is to bolster the section also by means of government-approved establishment of more posts, and through securing adequate material resources for this section within the Office of the Government.”

GRANT OF THE WORLD BANK AND EVALUATION OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT FOR SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF THE ROMANY MINORITY

Based on the above-stated requirements of the Office of the Plenipotentiary, the Government of the Slovak Republic was awarded a grant by the World Bank for the development of the capacities of the Secretariat in the amount of 278,300 USD. The Minister of Finance of the Slovak Republic signed the contract on May 5, 2000. An initial activity of importance regarding the restructuring of the Office took the form of the a study titled *Evaluation of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Solving the Problems of the Romany National Minority* carried out by Amrop Jenewein Group. The aim of this evaluation was to define key areas, which should be included within the scope of activities of the Plenipotentiary and the Secretariat, and to define the status and competences of this institution by focusing on strengthening its position within the state administration and elaborating its organizational structure.

The authors of the evaluation have evaluated negatively some of the activities of the Plenipotentiary, as well as the way the Secretariat operated. They have underlined that the activities of the Secretariat focused mainly on those areas that are quick to produce tangible results, such as the administration of the grant program and other operative tasks. The authors of the report pointed to the fact that the Office was carrying out some activities, which should not necessarily fall within the scope of its competences – such as addressing specific problems on the local level. The authors were also critical of the project selection criteria, due to the lack of clarity and the possibility of subjectivity in the evaluation process, as well as a possible risk of intervention into this process by the applicants.

A significant shortcoming in the operations of the Secretariat – as was pointed out in the review – was the lack of clearly-defined organizational structure of the Secretariat. At the same time, in their recommendations, the authors called for the increase in the capacities of the office on a qualitative and quantitative level. Based on these findings, an organizational structure was elaborated in the report, as well as a clear definition of individual positions within the Secretariat. Furthermore, various external institutions, organizations and individuals who can assist the Plenipotentiary in its activities were included in the organizational structure (see Scheme 5 in the *Addendum*).

In light of strong criticism by the auditors in regard to the functioning of the Office in the area of personnel, re-structuring of the Secretariat has been undertaken to remedy the situation. Three employees (coordinator for housing, project coordinator, and coordinator for human rights) were recalled from their posts. On May 9, 2001 the Plenipotentiary was recalled from his post; subsequently on July 1, 2001 Klára

Orgovánová was appointed to the post of the Plenipotentiary. In light of the new law on civil service, the positions of state employees had to be re-defined. All specialized employees were included in the category of (state level) civil servants, while all administrative employees were included in the public service category. The number of employees of the Secretariat was increased also by the number of positions proposed in the evaluation report; they were financed from the grant of the World Bank. The structure of the positions within the Secretariat can be seen in Scheme 6 (see the *Addendum*).

PROPOSED POSITIONS IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

COORDINATION OF COOPERATION WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

In light of the fact that during the tenure of Vincent Danihel, there was virtually no coordinated cooperation with non-governmental organizations dealing with problems of Roma communities, one of the recommendations of the auditors was to establish the position of a coordinator for cooperation with non-governmental organizations. This position was to be held by an employee with experience in the NGO sector. The position was to be financed for the period of the grant of the World Bank from the funds provided. After the funding by the World Bank ran out, this position was to be incorporated into the state administration and financed from the state budget. Agnes Horváthová, who has been previously employed in the Slovak Helsinki Committee, was appointed to the post of the coordinator for cooperation with non-governmental organizations. The benefit of such an appointment was that Horváthová had many personal contacts within the third sector. The cooperation with non-governmental organizations was made more effective also thanks to the personal contacts of the new Plenipotentiary, who prior to her appointment has worked as a director of non-profit organization InfoRoma. During the tenure of the Plenipotentiary, several seminars focusing on areas of education, human rights and community work have taken place.

The contribution of non-governmental organizations to the cooperation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary was reflected in the newly-established advisory committee of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities, whose members come from various Slovak non-governmental organizations. There have thus far been two sessions of the advisory council, which can be considered as insufficient; however, according to the employees of the Secretariat, the cooperation with the council members works well on an informal basis and many problem areas are addressed promptly over the phone or via e-mail. An employee of the Secretariat remarked: "There is also an advisory council which is comprised of individuals mainly from non-governmental organizations – this is how contact is maintained. We communicate with them on a regular basis; if someone turns to us, we try to find various activists directly in the regions who could attend to any given problem."

The Office of the Plenipotentiary was successful in creating an informal and unofficial network of non-governmental organizations with which there is an intensive cooperation underway, mainly in the area of consultation of different activities of the Secretariat.

In regards to the position of the coordinator for cooperation with non-governmental organizations, there are two basic problem areas with which the Office is confronted. Horváthová, since her appointment to the Office has also held the position of project coordinator of the World Bank, which included a large number of activities, and thus has often not allowed her to concentrate fully on her duties as a coordinator at the Office of the Plenipotentiary. In light of this fact, we can conclude that the Office of the Plenipotentiary has paid attention to creating a link to the non-governmental sector through the position of the coordinator, however, the effective fulfillment of the tasks of this position have not been implemented to the fullest extent possible. The other problem lies in the fact that after the World Bank grant was concluded, the position was to be incorporated into the organizational structure of the state administration. However, this has not happened, and since November 2002 within the Office, there is no longer the position of a coordinator of cooperation with non-governmental organizations. Due to the fact that non-governmental organizations play an important role in the preparatory process, as well as in the process of implementation of projects intended for Roma communities and improving their living conditions (these are also the basic priorities outlined by the Plenipotentiary), the coordination of activities of NGOs involved in Roma issues could contribute a more effective implementation of stated priorities of the Office of the Plenipotentiary.

FINANCIAL COORDINATION OF PROJECTS

Evaluation of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary... (2001) includes a finding that during the period when the evaluation was taking place, there was no overview of finances expended for projects and/or activities addressing problems of the Roma, nor was there a complex overview of possible sources of financing of projects. The expenditure of funds was not coordinated. The grant of the World Bank was utilized to establish the position of a project coordinator of finances, who at the same time held the post of a coordination assistant of the World Bank grant.

The daily duties of the employee at this post included management of the World Bank-funded project; coordination of tender committees; consultation in regards to World Bank documents and the terms of the grant; organization of trainings, seminars, study stays; communication with the World Bank and translation of documents of the Secretariat into the English language. The sheer multitude of these duties detracted from his focus on the task of financial coordination of projects. After the financial coverage of the Office by the World Bank came to an end, the position of the coordinator of the World Bank grant ceased to exist – this was primarily due to the fact that efforts to incorporate the post of “financial coordinator of projects” into the official organizational structure of the Office of the Plenipotentiary were not successful.

ASSISTANT TO THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

The duties of the assistant of the Plenipotentiary for the duration of the grant of the World Bank included day-to-day work with the Plenipotentiary, coordination of the program of the Plenipotentiary, preparation of materials for sessions of the cabinet, preparations for meetings with partner organizations and coordination of personnel coordination. These are the official duties of the assistant, however, due to the fact that the post of the director of the Secretariat was not filled at present, all activities officially falling under the competence of the director were transferred to the Plenipotentiary. The Plenipotentiary, however, cannot handle all the duties stipulated by the *Statute* (2002) and at the same time manage the operations of the Secretariat. Thus, most of these activities are performed by the assistant of the Plenipotentiary. Coordination of activities of individual employees falls also into the scope of the duties of the assistant. Since November 2002, the position of the assistant has been abolished for the same reasons as the two previous positions.

COORDINATOR FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

This position is discussed in detail in the chapter *Approach to Public Opinion and Public Relations*.

SATELLITE OFFICE IN PREŠOV

Based on the resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic # 886/2001 regarding the *Statute of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities and Organizational Structure of the Secretariat* adopted September 18, 2001, the Government has tasked the Ministry of Finances to allocate financial resources in the amount of 1,482,000 Sk for establishing a satellite office in Prešov, purchase of a motor vehicle for trips into difficult terrain, and to increase the expenditures of the budget chapter of the Office of the Government for the year 2002 to include the salaries of three additional employees.

The satellite office was established also as a response to the *Evaluation of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary...* (2001), and the need to provide support for the activities of the Plenipotentiary on the regional basis, especially when it comes to gathering information and data. The subsequent establishment of posts of regional coordinators was to make the link between the Plenipotentiary and the regions more flexible. Presently, the employees of the satellite office include a regional coordinator and his/her secretary. The employee who has originally held the post of consultant to the coordinator has stepped down so the post is presently vacant. The salary of the regional coordinator was financed from the grant of the World Bank; at present this post falls into the category of civil service.

The Secretariat of the Office of the Plenipotentiary and the satellite office are not effectively linked together in terms of communication channels. The exchange of information takes place via e-mail and includes exchanges of summaries of various meetings and planning sessions. The satellite office operates de-facto independently of the Office of the Plenipotentiary. A project titled *Social Field-workers Programme* was elaborated by an external consultant by the name of Karel Novák, and presently a regional consultant is in charge of its administration, which forms the brunt of the agenda of the satellite office. Moreover, through the satellite office (a de-facto regional research center), it is easier to respond, in an expeditious manner, to various problems that arise in the most problem-prone region.

EXTERNAL COLLABORATORS

On top of the posts which were proposed to be included within the internal organizational structure of the Secretariat, the World Bank has granted resources to cover the costs of external consultations and expertise, which could not be covered from the resources available to the Office of the Plenipotentiary, or for which financial resources could not be gained from the state budget. Thanks to this financial support, the following activities could be carried out:

- Research and preparation of projects – external consultant has compiled a database of approximately 130 foreign and domestic publications dealing with Roma or minority issues; has been engaged in the process of formulation of certain documents for the Secretariat; has worked as an interpreter at talks on minority self-administration in Hungary.
- Social care – a consultant held the position of a coordinator of a project titled *Comprehensive Development Programme for Roma Settlements*; has collected background documentation; has been engaged in the process of analyzing and preparation of government documents. Another consultant has been involved in the project *Social Field-workers Programme*; his tasks included selection of locations and local authorities willing to cooperate in the program, selection of field social workers, preparation of the concept of the project and other activities connected with the coordination of this project.
- Legal advising – two consultants have been involved in the process of elaboration of the *Statute of the Plenipotentiary* (2002).
- Education – the duties of the consultant included the collection and preparation of background information for the Plenipotentiary, processing of research data, meeting with the representative of the section of minority education at the Ministry of Education, and other activities.
- Health – a consultant to the Secretariat has carried out research in select Roma communities aimed at collecting information on the state of health of the Roma population as a launching point for the mapping of the situation in the area of drug dependency.
- By involving various experts – predominantly from the non-governmental sector, the Office of the Plenipotentiary has demonstrated its flexibility and at the same time has been able to free up some of the capacities of its internal employees.

CIVIL SERVICE POSTS

The posts of state employees – specialists on specific areas of improvement of the situation of the Roma have been predominantly created already during the tenure of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing the Problems of the Roma Minority. During the period of the development of the Secretariat and building of its capacities, there have been improvements made in the definition of task and responsibilities of its employees and qualified persons with long-standing experience in specific fields have been hired. Their duties are assigned based on the priorities set by the Plenipotentiary, allowing for a more effective and flexible operation of the Office.

On the down side, three posts were proposed in the official structure of the Office, including coordinator for cooperation with NGOs, project coordinator of finances, and assistant of the Plenipotentiary, which existed during the period thanks to the financial coverage of the World Bank grant; once the grant came to an end, however, these posts were abolished. During a period of approximately one year, employees at these posts have been engaged in planning and facilitating various activities and have participated in established a good platform for the functioning of the Secretariat for the upcoming period of four years; however,

elaboration and further branching out of these activities will not be possible because these posts were not classified as part of civil service, and as such do not qualify for funding from state budget.

In this regard, the position of the Slovak Government is surprising. On one hand, there is lack of willingness on part of the Government to support the existing and effectively functioning posts within the Secretariat which were credited with preparing, and implementing many important activities directed at providing assistance to Roma communities, on other hand, there are plans to open a Roma office in Košice and to hire 30 employees classified as civil servants and thus establish 30 new posts – i.e. to begin from scratch. Present organizational structure of the created jobs (at the level of civil service) is demonstrated in Scheme 7 (see the *Addendum*).

EVALUATION OF THE FUNCTIONING OF AND COOPERATION WITHIN THE SECRETARIAT

In the document titled *Evaluation of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Solving the Problems of the Romany National Minority* (2001), the focus was placed on coordination and management within the Office of the Plenipotentiary. The auditors have recommended to place emphasis on the formulation of strategic plans and evaluation of activities – to organize planning sessions and to carefully monitor the implementation of priorities set for each year, followed by evaluation sessions. A dramatic improvement in this area was achieved by defining the priorities of the Office of the Plenipotentiary, which form the basis for the day-to-day activities of the Office.

The director of the Office is responsible for the coordination of tasks within the Secretariat. In light of the fact that this position is presently vacant, other employees – ranging from the Plenipotentiary, through the assistant of the Plenipotentiary, to secretaries – perform the tasks under the competence of the director. However, such an approach is not very effective; the staff meetings of the Secretariat do not take place on a regular basis (usually with the periodicity of one to two a month). Presently, due to the fact that the post for the assistant of the Plenipotentiary has not been established, there is no employee within the Secretariat who is directly in charge of supervising and evaluating the activities of the employees.

In the proposed organizational structure, elaborated based on the audit of the activities of the Secretariat, all employees were to be subordinated to the director. In reality, however, the Plenipotentiary has filled in the post of the director. This arrangement creates various complications because of the scope of the Plenipotentiary's responsibilities simply does not allow for effective coordination of activities within the Office. This shortcoming is partially eliminated by informal relations within the Secretariat where the employees inform one another about specific activities, which they are carrying out. Yet another problem related to the vacancy of the position of the director regards official communication with state secretaries and director generals of sections at the level of ministries.

Based on formalized relations within the organizational structure of the Office of the Government, only the Plenipotentiary or the director of the Secretariat can communicate on official level with the representatives of ministries. Thus, the fact that the Secretariat does not have an acting director detracts from effective communication between the Secretariat and the ministries. The director of the Secretariat should at the same time be in charge of assigning tasks to the employees, as well as distributing correspondence in accordance with specialization of individual employees of the Secretariat. These tasks should be also carried out by the Plenipotentiary in cooperation with his/her assistant and secretary. Based on the findings of the analysis, the goals and the mission of the Secretariat, as well as the organizational structure and operations of the Secretariat, the following recommendations have been made:

- train select employees of the Secretariat in effective formulation of proposals of concepts in various fields,
- prepare and train select employees of the Secretariat in formulating proposals of alternative plans of addressing problems of the Roma minority,
- train select employees of the Secretariat in the process of implementation of *Strategies of the Government*,
- train employees of the Secretariat in the basics of strategic management,
- train and coordinate all employees of the Secretariat in comparative approach to existing Slovak and international legislature on ethnic minorities, issues of education, culture, healthcare and social policies,
- train and educate employees of the Secretariat in the fundamentals of project management,
- train select employees of the Secretariat to communicate in the English language.

Thanks to the grant from the World Bank, the following activities were carried out:

- English language course – took place between September 2000 and October 2002 intended for the employees of the Secretariat. A significant shortcoming during the tenure of Vincent Danihel was the fact that none of the employees of the Secretariat spoke the English language – thus, communication with representatives of foreign institutions was difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, it was necessary that employees of the Secretariat increase their knowledge in this area.
- Lecture on the reform of public administration – in light of the recent decentralization of the public administration it was necessary to educate the employees of the Secretariat about the new system and importance of the decentralization process, since the Office of the Plenipotentiary should closely cooperate with representatives of state and local administration.
- Study of American social security system – month-long study stay in the United States attended by the coordinator for legal issues. During the study stay, the coordinator has met with three representatives of local administration and most of her time was spent in a Good Will Foundation, which offers services based on principle of decentralization.
- Week-long seminar organized by the National Association Uniting Roma Organizations in Hungary – employees of the Secretariat, state and local administration, Roma activists and representatives of NGOs have attended a seminar aimed at increasing their knowledge of the social situation of Roma communities in Hungary and systems of approaches to the issue.
- Training in effective communication and management – the aim of the series of seminars was to improve the horizontal and vertical communication within the Secretariat; improve the channels of communication directed outward; contribute to the improvement of cooperation between members of the team; to learn time management techniques and techniques to avoid stress. It is not certain to what extent the seminar was effective, because – as was mentioned above – the coordination of activities within the Secretariat is not without problems in light of the vacant position of the director. Furthermore, communication within the Secretariat is based on informal relations, which were established prior to this seminar.

In general, we can conclude that the Secretariat has reacted flexibly to the recommendations of the audit team and majority of the proposed measures were implemented into its operation. The employees of the Secretariat have welcomed the changes – namely the English language course that has allowed them to improve their knowledge and effectiveness in communication in a foreign language. All recommendations, however, were not implemented and therefore it would be advisable in the future to include training sessions for employees in formulation of concepts in various fields; elaboration of proposals of alternative approaches to problems of the Roma minority; provide training sessions for all employees in comparative studies between existing Slovak and international legislative norms regarding ethnic minorities, education systems, culture, healthcare and social policies – while keeping in mind the financial and organizational capacities of the Secretariat.

BUILDING OF THE SECRETARIAT (OFFICE SPACE AND EQUIPMENT)

The Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing Problems of Roma Minority was founded in 1999 in Bratislava. Initially, it was housed in the offices of the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic and hardware necessary for its operation (in the form of obsolescent computers) was obtained from the abolished Office for the Strategy of Development of the Society, Science and Technology of the Slovak Republic.

The Government of the Slovak Republic, based on resolution # 127/1999, has tasked the Minister of Finances to earmark from the budget of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic material and financial resources necessary for its operations; quantities and nature of resources has not been specified. The offices of the Secretariat were housed in a building that was undergoing a reconstruction at that time; the office space was not of sufficient standard for such an institution. The building in which the Secretariat was housed is located approximately 20 minutes by mass transportation from the Office of the Government. This distance has had the effect of complicating communication between the two institutions of the state administration. The employees of the Office at the time had limited access to internet – thus no e-mail communication was possible. The problem with the distance from the Office of the Government remains, however, the building that houses it has undergone reconstruction so the offices meet the basic requirements of the status of this type of state institution.

In terms of material resources available for its operations, at the time the *Evaluation of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary ...* (2001) was being composed, there were 9 computers, 5 printers, a copying machine, a fax machine, 4 radios, 1 television set, and 1 refrigerator and freezer at the Office. According to the employees, the number of computers was insufficient.

The grant of the World Bank has made it possible to improve the situation by providing financial resources for the purchase of equipment and for establishing a satellite office in Prešov. Overall, the World Bank has provided financial resources in the amount of 18,000 USD, which represented 85% of the financial resources expended for purchase of equipment for the Bratislava-based office, as well as the satellite office. The Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic provided the remaining 15% of finances. The financial resources were expended in the following way:

- purchase of off-road motor vehicle for the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic (total expenditures: 950,000 Sk),
- opening of satellite office in Prešov (total expenditures: 282,000 Sk, out of this amount: salaries and wages of employees: 205,000 Sk, social insurance; health insurance for employees: 77, 000 Sk).

Overall, the amount of financial resources expended to improve the material capacities of the Secretariat could be considered as satisfactory. In the future, it will be necessary to focus mainly on improving personnel resources on a qualitative and quantitative level. The structure of posts in the official organizational structure does not differ much from the situation from period prior to when the grant of the World Bank was awarded. Abolishing these posts would mean that a good portion of the financial resources expended by the World Bank would be spent ineffectively because in a year's time since the investment was made, groundwork for initial stages of many long-term activities was laid down.

APPROACH TO PUBLIC OPINION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

The cultivation of relations with the public, media and institutions of public administration should be one of the priorities of every organization. Especially important is this task in a situation when the public opinion or media have adopted a neutral or negative stance toward the organization or its activities. This is the case of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, that is confronted with a problem of negative attitude toward the Roma held by the public, the media and some politicians.

PERIOD MARCH 1999 – JUNE 2001

This period is characterized by the foundation of the Secretariat and building up of its capacities. Among the activities, which demanded immediate attention of the Secretariat, there was no sufficient attention paid to the task of building up of its capacities. Within the organizational structure, there was not even a position of a coordinator of media activities and public relations (from hereafter referred to as PR). Activities falling into the competences of an employee at this post were carried out by an external employee. This employee has, however, paid only marginal attention to this task – it has been only one of many duties he/she was responsible for at the Secretariat. The activities in the PR area have included reactions to press coverage showing the Secretariat in a negative light, and providing occasional information about the activities of the Secretariat through Roma periodical *Romano Nevo Eil*. According to employees of the Secretariat, there was no willingness or pressure applied to inform the public about the Office's activities because the activities that did take place were not judged as warranting media attention.

Thus, the Secretariat had a difficult task ahead of it – on top of concentrating on building a positive image for itself, it has to the same extent – if not even greater – focus on creating and cultivating a positive image of the object of its focus – that is the positive image of the Roma population itself. A positive step that has represented a slight progress in this area was made during the period the Office was headed by Vincent Danihel – in the form of participation in *Action Plan for Prevention of All Forms of Discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Other Manifestations of Intolerance During the Period 2000 – 2001* (from hereafter referred to as *Action Plan*).

Furthermore, there were other shortcomings in the operations of the Secretariat during this period, such as the fact that almost no employee, including the Plenipotentiary himself, spoke the English language at a conversation level, which represented a barrier to networking and maintaining good relations with international organizations. Moreover, the Plenipotentiary has scarcely engaged in the communication with the media; however, passive approach was mutual. The situation was characterized by a general lack of willingness or interest to cultivate closer relations between the media and the Office of the Plenipotentiary. Furthermore, there were only three or four press conferences held at this time, but these were only held in regards to the Plenipotentiary's recall from office. Good relations with the media form the basis for every public office – this is especially the case when it comes to the topic of Roma minority.

Internet was an important information channel that was under-utilized during this period. The Secretariat did not have its own website – information on its activities were posted on the website of the Government and included only the *Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing Problems of the Roma Minority - Stages I and II.*, on which the Secretariat has participated, the list of employees of the Secretariat, and contact information. The auditors, in their report, have also highlighted some other shortcomings – they have pointed out that a concept of work with media was missing, and have labeled the filling of a PR position by an external collaborator as unsatisfactory. The image of the Secretariat – perhaps the most important product of PR strategy – was evaluated from without (by organizations involved with the Roma issues) in a questionnaire. These are the findings:

- In majority of cases, they could state the aims and role of the Secretariat; they could not, however, list the activities of the Secretariat.
- They mentioned insufficient transparency and lack of information
- Roma respondents did not consider the Plenipotentiary to be someone who would represent their interests; some representatives of Roma organizations stated that despite their efforts to contact the Office, they were not successful.

- Secretariat is identified – by the members of Roma civic organizations and organizations involved with Roma issues – above-all with its grant administration role.

Based on these findings, the auditors proposed that following measures be implemented:

- create a post of coordinator for relations with public and media,
- formulate a concept of relations with the public and cooperation with the media,
- create an independent website of the Office of the Plenipotentiary in English and Slovak language (the materials and information about the activities of the Secretariat were posted on the website of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic),
- publish an informative bulletin containing up-to-date information on activities aimed at addressing problems of the Roma and make it available to a broad range of individuals and institutions such as the parliament, ministries, district and regional offices, local administration, NGOs, etc.,
- in the process of implementation of the *Strategy of the Government*, combating discrimination, and promoting a positive image of the Roma, utilize the approach characteristic of information campaigns,
- in the process of combating manifestations of racism and intolerance, facilitate the cooperation of all institutions and organizations involved in this agenda because such an approach maximizes the effectiveness of the Secretariat,
- at meetings and negotiations, present basic information on the status and activities of the Secretariat in the form of brochures and other information materials in several language versions,
- delegate the portion of requests and complaints that can be addressed at lower levels of state administration to this level,
- bring the Office of the Plenipotentiary closer to the citizens by establishing a satellite office and posts of regional coordinators.

PERIOD JULY 2001 – OCTOBER 2002

After the personnel changes in the Office of the Plenipotentiary in the form of the appointment of the new Plenipotentiary in July 2001, a second phase in the operation of the Secretariat was began. Its aim was to make changes to the activities of the Secretariat in line with the recommendations of the audit.

Based on the recommendation of the audit, a position of “coordinator of relations with public and media” at the level of civil service was established. The duties of the employee at this post were as follows:

- formulates PR strategy of the Secretariat,
- coordinates employees and ensures that the strategy is upheld,
- defines policies toward the media,
- formulates proposals and coordinates PR activities of the Plenipotentiary and the Secretariat,
- cultivates relations with the media and fosters close cooperation with them
- cooperates closely with the Plenipotentiary,
- monitors the media and researches information related to Roma issues in all available media – print, internet, etc.
- cooperates with the press media and information center of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic.

Based on the description of duties outlined above, the parameters for the post at the level of civil service were set. According to these parameters, the duties of an employee at this post were to include evaluation of reactions in the media to the approaches and measures adopted by the Government in the area of addressing issues of concern to the Roma community, preparation of materials for decision-making, and elaboration of media policies regarding the Roma minority.

Other activities, responsibilities and duties included the following:

- preparation of background materials for analysis of the work of foreign correspondents and journalists writing/reporting on Slovakia with focus on the policies of the Government aimed to address problems of the Roma communities,

- daily monitoring of media, preparation of official positions in response to media coverage of the Roma,
- monitoring of the perception of developments in Slovakia in domestic and foreign media in regard to issues related to addressing the problems of Roma communities,
- elaboration of PR strategy for the Secretariat, oversight of its implementation,
- formulation of proposals and coordination of PR activities of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary.

During the period between July 2001 and October 2002, three employees have held this position. Presently, an interview process is underway to fill this post. Such a rapid turnover of employees is of concern. In light of the often negative public opinion, this position is highly demanding and requires a high level of expertise in PR, effective communication with all employees of the Secretariat, including the Plenipotentiary, as well as time for such a position to get established in the media circles, as well as the public. It seems that the employees who have held this post could not meet these demanding criteria (as was evidenced by the rapid turnover).

On top of the establishment of post of coordinator of relations with the public and the media (civil service post), a position of coordinator of media activities was established and financed from the resources provided by the World Bank. However, the employee at this post was classified only as an external consultant. Drawing on long-standing experience in this area, the employee at this post has proposed a concept of media strategy and has also advised the Plenipotentiary in the area of public relations. However, due to the sporadic nature of visits to the Secretariat, problems arose in the process of implementation of this strategy. Based on the media strategy, the Secretariat began to initiate activities with focus on two areas, which meant that it has exceeded the scope of responsibilities and competences outlined in the official description of its duties – especially in the areas of informing the public, media, state administration about activities undertaken and successes achieved by the Secretariat, as well as in the realm of influencing in a positive sense the public opinion regarding the Roma.

INFORMING THE PUBLIC, MEDIA AND STATE ADMINISTRATION ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSES ACHIEVED BY THE SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat should be responsible for systemic compilation of information about the Roma and provide this information to other institutions and individuals participating in addressing Roma issues. Since the Plenipotentiary is identified as a key person in the area of addressing problems of the Roma in the Slovak Republic, it is crucial that he/she has access to up-to-date information regarding this issue. This information is subsequently passed down through the Office of the Plenipotentiary to other institutions and/or individuals involved in the process of addressing the problems of the Roma. At the same time, the Plenipotentiary should provide information on his/her positions and activities in the area of addressing problems of the Roma. These activities fall also into the sphere of competence of the coordinator of public relations and the media, who is responsible for daily monitoring of the media, participates in formulating official statements and provides information regarding the operations and/or activities of the Secretariat. Furthermore, his/her duties include organizing press conferences, providing information from these conferences, and formulating official declarations for the press.

Information Channels

Internet

Presently, the internet is one of the fastest growing media and due to its accessibility, it has become the most widely used source of information. Information about the Roma minority are among the most sought topics, not only among the Slovak public, media or state administration, but also by individuals and various institutions from abroad. For this reason, it is highly advisable that utmost attention be devoted to the website of the Secretariat and was not addressed only as a necessary but “marginal” activity.

In the recent period, the Secretariat has made positive improvements in this area by creating its own website, thus implementing the recommendations of the auditors. The website has a standard format and contains all necessary information, such as the status of the organization, list of employees, press releases, official statements, speeches, and priorities, etc.

Table 3**List of materials posted on the website of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities**

INFORMATION (38)	Documents (resolutions of the government, <i>Strategies of the Government</i> , information on programs...) (29)
	Others (9)
PRIORITIES (4)	
AGENDA (29)	Press releases (19)
	Statements and positions (6)
	Speeches (2)
	Others (2)
CALENDAR	List of business trips and important events (54)
FOTOGALLERY (9)	11th annual Christmas bazaar (3)
	From the archives of the Plenipotentiary
	Visit of goat farm (3)
C.V.	
STATUTE	
OTHER WEBSITES (59)	Website of the Office of the Government (15)
	Slovak websites devoted to issues of the Roma community (19)
	International websites devoted to issues of the Roma community (17)
	Czech websites devoted to issues of the Roma community (5)
	Centers of Roma studies (3)
CONTACTS	
SECRETARIAT	

Source: www.government.gov/orgovanova.

However, due to the fact that the information is divided into many categories, at first sight it is not clear in what category one should look for the information sought. In order for the website devoted to Roma issues to attract the desired attention it should “follow the trends” by reacting to the demand and making the website interesting for different groups of population. The website itself is informative, but not very appealing, which happens to be the problem of majority of the websites of the public administration. A significant drawback, however, is the fact that only a portion of the materials posted on the website is translated into the English language, which in light of the great demand for information from abroad is utterly unacceptable. Creation of an independent website under the domain www.romovia.sk was a part of the media strategy. The website was to contain all-important information regarding the Roma minority, not only information on the activities of the Secretariat. However, the project was not brought to a successful fruition because it was thought that the existing websites on issues related to Roma minority would successfully meet the demand for such information. The authors of this report do not consider the reasons provided for not creating such a website as justifiable. There is a robust demand for in-depth information on this topic from abroad to be offered in foreign languages, which none of the existing websites presently meets.

Print and Electronic Media

Since the appointment of Klára Orgovánová to the post of the Plenipotentiary, there has been a marked improvement in relations of the Office with the media. Thanks to the fact that the Plenipotentiary and the coordinator of media activities have had extensive contacts with the media prior to their appointment to their respective posts, good relations between the media and the Office of the Plenipotentiary have been established since the very beginning. The new Plenipotentiary has realized the importance of the role of the media could play in presenting a positive image of the Secretariat. She continues to be forthcoming in her approach to the media and offers them personally all the requested information. The result of this approach has been that journalists and reporters have started to turn more frequently to the Secretariat for information.

Press releases were issued on a regular basis (by the time this report has gone to print, there has been a total of 19 press releases). Press conferences were also held to inform the media and the public about the activities of the Secretariat and issues of importance. According to the proposals of the audit, the Secretariat was to publish its own periodical – an informative bulletin containing up-to-date information on the issues connected to addressing the problems of Roma minority, which was intended for parliament, ministries, regional and district offices, and NGOs. However, this plan did not materialize – the reasons given by the employees of the Secretariat were the lack of demand for such a publication, claim that important materials and documents are posted on the website, and that the most important documents are regularly published in periodicals, such as *Parlamentný kuriér* (Parliamentary Courier), *Verejná správa* (Public Administration), *Obecné noviny* (District newspaper)... Moreover, the employees stated that there is a Roma newspaper *Romano Nevo Eil*, that covers issues of importance to the Roma community and the decision-makers, including the activities of the Secretariat. In their view, the available financial resources should therefore be allocated to problem areas within the Roma community, which require urgent attention. The authors of this report agree with this position, especially due to the high information content of the website of the Secretariat.

CREATING A POSITIVE IMAGE OF THE ROMA MINORITY

The coordinator of media activities, based on recommendations made in the audit as well as the findings of analysis of media monitoring, has elaborated a media strategy titled *We are all Citizens of the Slovak Republic – Cooperation is the Key to Improving the Relations Between Roma and Non-Roma*. A media commission was established with the aim of evaluating the effectiveness of this campaign and contributing to its implementation. However, this commission did not have an official status, or a clearly-defined composition of its members. It meets on an ad hoc basis. The strategy is based on the following premises:

- Relations between the representatives of state and local administration on one hand, and the Roma on the other hand is ambivalent, it is not based on civic principle, and contains elements of latent racism (known examples of hate speech...).
- General perception and approach of the media toward the Roma is more negative than it is positive; the reporting often contains elements of open or concealed racism; the reporting on the Roma is often skewed and marked by a drive for sensationalism, often disregarding the broader context of issues; classification of an individual as Roma is often made in response to the color of the skin of the individual and is often made out of context and only when it comes to the Roma.
- The perception of the Roma by the public is heavily influenced and shaped by the approach to and perception of this ethnic group of the representatives of state administration and the media, as well as personal experiences often without awareness of wider context of the situation/behavior of the Roma.

These premises seem to correctly sum up the situation and are based on the findings of public opinion surveys, as well as analysis of media monitoring. The strategy also sets the following goals:

1. to improve the way information is presented to the public by public officials on different levels of state administration (state and local) by focusing on providing objective information,
2. to improve the way information is presented by the media – in terms of quantity of the information about addressing the problems of the Roma, as well as quality of the information provided,
3. through the media campaign *Čačipen/Pravda* (Truth) to increase the public awareness of the positive examples from the Roma communities, initiation of a positive dialogue between the Roma and non-Roma.

Based on analysis of the state of affairs, state and local administration, media, and public were selected as target groups for the media activities. The campaign itself was financed from a grant provided by the World Bank in the amount of 77,225 USD. The campaign itself included a number of activities and involved non-governmental organizations dealing with Roma issues. Due to the sheer number of different activities, many of them were not brought to a successful completion and there was a number of several shortcomings in their implementation.

Activities

State and Local Administration

- training of press secretaries

Date: January 23, 2002.

Title: *Roma and their Place in the Slovak Society*.

Goal: To provide the employees of state institutions who come into contact with the media and the public with the basic information about Roma communities. The target audience included various ministries, presidential, office, parliamentary office and others. The participants of the seminars engaged in discussion on various topics, such as human rights, adequacy of certain terms used when referring to the Roma minority, as well as the development of Roma communities in a historical perspective. A compilation of studies from the conference was published under the same title. There were plans for the participants of the conference to participate in the process of analysis and elaboration of documents and reports formulated by the public administration, however, this activity did not take place.

Media

- analysis of the media
- dialogues with editors-in-chief

Within this activity, several meetings have taken place intended to facilitate mutual exchange of information about activities but also to establish contacts with the media community, as well as to find mutually agreeable approaches to presenting the objective image of Roma in the Slovak media. Also included in these meetings was a presentation of the results of the monitoring prepared by the Slovak Helsinki Committee (SHV) and a discussion on how to improve the situation of the Roma minority in Slovakia.

- seminar for journalists
date: August 22 – 23, 2002.

Participants: experts from the Slovak Helsinki Committee, editors of print and electronic media with nation-wide reach. The aim of this two-day seminar was to discuss approach of journalists in reporting on the Roma and to the presentation in the media of the image of the Roma community as a whole.

- media and the Roma – informative guide for journalists

Based on the report on the media coverage elaborated by the Slovak Helsinki Committee, as well monitoring that was conducted by EccE organization based in Košice, a compilation of contributions on relations with the Roma community was published. The publication serves as a basic source of information for journalists and contains analysis of historical aspects of the Roma population, its historical and psychological characteristics, overview of the situation of the Roma in Slovakia, analysis of the coverage of the Roma by the media, as well as an account of the most commonly occurring mistakes in the approach in reporting on the Roma minority in the media. The publication was distributed to the participants of the seminar and is available at the Secretariat.

- educational session for journalists in Spiš

Date: October 18 – 19, 2002.

Participants: journalists from state and local media.

The region of central Spiš is a region that attracts the most attention when it comes to coverage of Roma issues. Thus, an informal meeting of journalists and Roma, as well as non-Roma population in Spišská Nová Ves was organized within a campaign aimed at increasing the level of informedness of the public and lowering the “barriers” existing between the Roma and non-Roma population. As a part of the session, a group of journalists visited the cultural, educational and counseling center of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, the Vilčurňa settlement, and the community center in Rudňany, kindergarten and settlement in Hrabušince. Towards the end of the session, journalists have played a football match against the members of the sports club in Smižany and have attended a presentation of Roma cuisine.

- Cooperation between Roma and non-Roma media

Date: August 13 – October 25, 2002.

Participants: Jekethane civic organization Prešov;
RPA, Košice.

Cooperation between Roma and non-Roma media has led to increasing the publicity of successful projects, and influential representatives of the Roma community contributing to the dismantling of existing stereotypes of the Roma. The aim of the project was to offer to representatives of non-Roma media as much objective information as possible – information that was compiled by Roma journalists who have an in-depth knowledge of the issues involved.

- Baroro

Motto: *Cikno bar šaj del mujal the baro verdan.*

(Even a small stone can overturn a large carriage – Roma proverb).

The Secretariat has announced a competition for journalists with the aim of reversing the standard approach of one-way flow of information in the coverage of Roma issues in the media. Thus, the journalists writing about Roma issues and upholding the below-outlined principles in their coverage would receive moral recognition in addition to being awarded financial prizes. The criteria for such a recognition include the following:

- contribute to strengthening the civic principle – the initial phase of positive communication between the Roma and the non-Roma,
- focus on true roots and the complexity of issues,
- use approach that aims to eliminate the deep-rooted prejudices toward the Roma,
- provide a true image of the Roma and related issues with attention to their complexity, without providing misleading or skewed information,
- report on the most-sizable portion of the Roma population – the middle class, which is often neglected in the coverage of the media,
- offer adequate coverage to Roma, as well as non-Roma individuals who contribute to the improvement of the situation and status of the Roma community within the society,
- foster bonds of the Roma to their community and historical roots,
- contribute to changing the stereotypical portrayal of Roma issues.

Initially, the competition was intended solely for journalists of print media, but due to the interest from representatives of the electronic media, as of September 2002, they were included in the project. Overall, 35 entrants have joined in the competition.

The Public

- campaign *Čačipen – Pravda* (The oda hin čačipen... – This is also the truth...)

Date: April 8 – 30, 2002

Main partner: Jekchetane civic organization

This campaign was perhaps the most influential activity of the media strategy of the Secretariat. Its aim was to increase the effectiveness of communication with the public on issues regarding the Roma community. The campaign was launched in Bratislava on April 8, 2002 – the international day of the Roma by the opening the Roma traveling exhibit in the National Education Center (Národné Osvetové Centrum). On this occasion, various non-governmental organizations, schools district offices, and other institutions were approached to prepare activities and through cooperation with the Secretariat to promote these activities by making them visible on a nation-wide level. Altogether, 150 entries including more than 200 activities devoted to culture, sport, education, and other areas were registered. The campaign was also supported by the Slovak Television (STV – a state run TV channel) that has broadcast a series of short clips devoted to aspects of the life of the Roma middle class, which generally enjoys less attention in the media coverage.⁶ Despite the fact that the TV clips were well produced and they had the potential to reach out to sizable TV audiences, they were broadcast during an unsuitable time, and also only once. Furthermore, the Secretariat is initiating activities whereby it would engage in close cooperation with the Slovak Television on future projects. Yet another activity within the campaign was the performance of Romathan theatre that took place in Astorka theatre. The pinnacle of the campaign was the music festival “Mosty” (Bridges) that took place between April 26 and 27, 2002. The campaign also included a festival titled “between the heavens and earth” that included performances of Roma and non-Roma artists from Slovakia, as well as abroad, and

⁶ According to the author of the concept of the campaign, journalists in their coverage focus predominantly on two groups of Roma – dozens of “exceptional” Roma who have made significant achievements, and the hundreds, even thousands of individuals at the absolute lowest echelons of the society. According to the author, an approach is needed that would focus on the middle class, the ordinary Roma – and this was the intent behind the TV clips.

the traveling exhibit of the works of Roma and non-Roma artists organized by Jekehetane civic organization. Other activities that took place within the campaign included the following:

- Meeting at the Donors' Forum foundation aimed at coordinating the activities within the campaign and initiation of long-term cooperation between various actors involved,
- Presentation of the World Bank Report titled *Poverty and Welfare of the Roma In the Slovak Republic* held in Poprad, Prešov and Bratislava,
- International seminar with the aim of comparing the results of the analyses of Slovak and Hungarian donors supporting projects involving the Roma community.

Overall, the campaign was a great success and the Secretariat plans to hold another such event next year.

- series of presentations "Roma in Slovakia – a view from nowhere"

Date: October 14 – 15, 2002

Participants: university students and the public

The series of presentations was organized by the Secretariat in cooperation with Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), Department of Roma Culture in Nitra, and Slovak Academic and Information Agency (SAIA). The presentations were held at universities in Trnava, Nitra, and at the headquarters of SFPA and included the following presenters: Eva Orós Hegyesi, Hungarian state secretary of the Ministry of Health, Social Affairs and Family; Milena Hübschmanová from the institute of Indian studies of Department of Philosophy of Charles University, Prague; and William Baker, president of the Association for Social Reform.

It is a difficult task to evaluate this campaign, due to the fact that changes in the rhetoric of representative of state administration, media, as well as in the positions of the public take a long-time to materialize. The general approach encompassing lectures, seminars and trainings can be evaluated as successful. In light of the experiences gained in this process, it can be replicated in the future. Furthermore, the approach can be perfected even further, where necessary, and applied it at lower levels of the state and local administration. It can also involve a broader range of population and institutions, such as medical personnel, members of the police force, the army, the judiciary that would come into contact with the Roma minority.

It should be highlighted, however, that the strategy of the media campaign was correct in its approach. Public opinion surveys attest to the long-standing, high level of manifestation of social distancing of the majority population toward the Roma minority, which is present at all levels of the population, and across all age groups, education levels, sex, type of employment, religious affiliation, preferences in the area of economy and foreign policy. Moreover, the approach of the society toward the Roma is heavily influenced by prejudices, stereotypes, and simplified "categorization" that is adopted by the media in its coverage of this ethnic minority; personal experiences with members of this minority are often secondary. These findings are alarming and are also the result of the approach of the media to reporting on the Roma minority. Thus, unbalanced reporting on the Roma that includes stereotypes and prejudices, leads to a phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecy since exposure to such reporting influences the behavior and views of the audiences.

The occurrence of anti-Roma sentiments is also exacerbated by the actions and statements of the representatives of the majority population, such as employees of the state and local administration, police officers, and health care workers. Some political leaders also misuse the existing prejudices and negative attitudes of the public toward the Roma, which is interpreted by a portion of the population as legitimization of their own positions. The end result of such an approach is the increase in the aversion of the majority population toward the Roma minority. Latent racism, which is exhibited by ambivalence toward, or a tacit approval of open manifestations of racism, represents a grave danger to the society.

There are also cases when conflicts and frequency of their occurrence between the majority population and Roma minority are over-dramatized in the rhetoric of employees of public administration, or in the reporting of the media. The extremes in the co-existence of these two groups are often intentionally exaggerated and thus chances for peaceful coexistence are threatened in places where it was previously a norm. Such an unbalanced approach has the effect of instilling a sense of fear within the society and contributes to the phenomenon of social distancing in areas where there was previously no ground for such manifestations. Thus, a false impression of a lack of positive examples in the life of the Roma is artificially created. There is not much interest shown by the representatives of district offices or the Roma themselves to seek media attention in areas that are conflict-free; on the contrary – they consider it to be a success if there is no mention of the so-called "Roma problem" in connection with their district. Thus, such positive examples of co-existence are not taken into account by the general public, which influenced by the media, perceives the Roma predominantly as a problematic ethnic group dependent on social welfare. Such is the "prototype" of a Roma embedded in the consciousness of the public, which then influences their views and positions.

The monitoring of the media also points to the role media play in the unfavorable perception of the Roma by the majority population in the Slovak Republic. The promotion by the media of the so-called “neutral” position on issues involving the Roma minority (often in regards to alarming problems) provides a fertile ground for manifestations of latent racism, which is almost “genetically” embedded in the thinking of the non-Roma population. Furthermore, this approach when employed – either unintentionally or intentionally – serves as a vehicle for manifestations of racial intolerance and hate. The following findings were made based on the analysis of the media monitoring:

- The image of the Roma portrayed by the Slovak media accentuates the positions and opinions of the majority population, of which the media are a part,
- Highlighting of stereotypes and prejudices about the Roma created by the majority is an element characteristic of the portrayal of the Roma minority by the media, however, the media do not consider the presence of this element to be a manifestation of racism,
- The image of the Roma, compared to other ethnic minorities and nationalities is highly specific, compared. Focus is placed on information about the criminal, psychological, and social characteristics of the Roma. Majority of the news pieces about the Roma are anti-Roma in nature.
- The existence of the so-called estimates about the number of Roma and the demographic trends of this minority have the effect of creating in the perception of the majority population negative associations with individual members or, the whole ethnic group.
- Stereotypes and prejudices against the Roma have arisen in the course of historical development; this process was influenced by the political and socio-economic factors determining the characteristics of the society, of which the Roma have – more or less – been a part and which has tolerated them, or at times has directed hard repressive measures against them. These stereotypes and prejudices are of long-standing nature and are deep-rooted (Cangár, 2002).

Based on the analysis of media monitoring, there are certain recommendations that can be made for employees of the media or those involved with the media on a professional or non-professional level. The adherence to these recommendations help to reverse the negative trends in the media coverage of Roma issues and could lead to the improvement of the “climate” within the society.

1. It is necessary to formulate a concept of the media strategy for presenting the minorities on public TV channels.
2. All involved individuals/institutions should adopt positive reporting on the Roma minority on public TV channels; such an approach is also recommended to private media.
3. The media should, on a regular basis and in a systemic fashion, include the coverage of the activities of the Roma ethnic minority – its history, culture, traditions and contemporary life – in programming devoted to culture, education, as well as programming intended for the younger generation. This approach would lead to fostering mutually good relations, tolerance and understanding between the Roma and other citizens of the Slovak Republic.
4. The management of media corporations (namely state – run STV and radio broadcast stations) should adopt personnel policies conducive to hiring of the Roma minority to the high-profile posts of anchors, reporters.
5. STV management should undertake steps to inform the public on a regular basis about the activities of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities in the form of coverage of press conferences and other appearances in public media (Cangár, 2002).

RECAPITULATION

Under the leadership of Klára Orgovánová, the Secretariat has made dramatic strides forward in the area of public relations. While, during the preceding period the activities in this area were limited, at the time of the writing of this report the relations with the media and the public are on a standard level.

All activities, which were carried out in this area were in line with the priorities of the Government and to a great extent have utilized the recommendations made in the audit. The promotion of a positive image of the Secretariat, but above all, the promotion of positive image of the Roma, was not included among the four main priorities on which, in the words of the Plenipotentiary, the activities of the Secretariat should focus.

The influence of the public opinion remains strong; the support of public opinion can either contribute to reaching the stated goals; unfavorable public opinion, on the other hand, it can make the implemen-

tation of goals more difficult. Thus, the factor of unfavorable public opinion is of high importance for the mission the Secretariat of improving the situation of Roma communities. Improving the perception of the Roma by the majority population is an important pre-requisite for improving the situation in Roma communities. Tense relations between the Roma and the majority population, as well as a high degree of social distancing lead to social exclusion of this ethnic group. The Secretariat should prevent the situation from deteriorating by fostering a positive image of the Roma. In no case, should the importance of this task be underestimated.

Even though a lot has been accomplished in this area by the team of employees of the Secretariat, there are still areas that require significant improvement – however, the measures undertaken have a chance of success only if they build on the existing media strategy.

To evaluate the results of the activities of the Secretariat is a difficult task, if it is at all possible. Changing the public perception that has been exposed to stereotypes and prejudices is a long process that is impossible to quantify. Nevertheless, the media strategy formulated by the Office of the Plenipotentiary can be evaluated as successful. What remains to be seen, however, is whether there will be financial, technical and personnel resources available for its further elaboration.

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE GOVERNMENT FOR ROMA COMMUNITIES AND STATE ADMINISTRATION

Since 1989, there were many activities carried out by the state and local administration, as well as non-governmental organizations aimed at addressing problems of Roma communities. The present situation members of this minority find themselves in seem to suggest that these activities have not led to expected results. One of the reasons for the shortcomings of these activities was the lack of a broader concept, or a strategy that would ensure the effectiveness of projects (no initial conceptual framework was elaborated). Yet another factor detracting from the effectiveness of the activities was the general lack of coordination between institutions and complementarity of different projects.

The establishment of the post of the Plenipotentiary, and later, the elaboration of a concept material titled *Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing the Problems of Roma Minority - Stages I and II* were to lead to the improvement in the situation. Furthermore, an Inter-departmental Commission for the Affairs of Roma Communities was established to achieve a greater level of coordination between state institutions and to increase the effectiveness of communication between sections of state administration.

Close cooperation between the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and state administration is also stipulated by *Statute* (2002), which however, does not address the issue of the linkage or division of competences between the Plenipotentiary and other sections of the state administration – namely the ministries. Thus, cooperation between the Plenipotentiary and other state institutions depends on the willingness of the parties involved to cooperate, since it is not within the scope of the Plenipotentiary's competences to intervene in the agenda of the ministries due to its status of an advisory body to the ministries, as well as the Government itself.

Aside for the *Statute* (2002) and the above-mentioned *Strategy of the Government*, the terms and principles of cooperation of the Plenipotentiary and institutions of the state administration are also defined in documents, such as international treaties the Slovak Republic has acceded to, the Program Manifesto of the Government, Priorities of the Government toward Roma Communities for the year 2002, priorities that are set by the Plenipotentiary, as well as concept materials on specific issues related to the Roma community elaborated by specific ministries (including the *Concept of Upbringing and Education of Roma Children and Pupils*, elaborated by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, *Program for Improving the Environment, Hygiene, and Prevention of Infectious Diseases of Inhabitants of Roma Settlements*, elaborated by the State Health Institute of the Slovak Republic [ŠZÚ SR] and submitted by the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic [MZ SR], and many others). The role of these documents in addressing the problems of the Roma community is not clear; there seems to be a lack of holistic approach to the issue. In this regard, there are several questions that should be asked when it comes to the above-mentioned documents-which one is of priority to the Government?; do the concept materials elaborate or complement the existing *Strategy of the Government*, or priorities of the Government?; how are they related to the priorities of the Plenipotentiary, etc. In the context of the ambiguities of these documents, in the following section, we will outline the structure of cooperation of institutions of state administration and district offices with the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary.

COOPERATION WITH INSTITUTIONS OF STATE ADMINISTRATION

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNMENT

The Plenipotentiary cooperates with the Office of the Government – namely the section of human rights. The cooperation usually takes place in the process of elaboration of projects supported by Phare program.

Even though the process of preparation, evaluation and implementation of projects within the Phare program falls within the competence of the section of human rights (mainly the division of project coordination), the Plenipotentiary and the Secretariat participate in this process on several levels. According to

Kinga Novotná, the director of the division of project coordination, the cooperation with the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary allows them to utilize expert analysis, for elaboration of which there is often no time within the division. Moreover, the employees of the Secretariat are specialists on certain aspects of Roma communities, which allow them to elaborate a more detailed analysis of issues at hand. The information that is utilized by the division of project coordination includes the kinds of projects carried out and the specific locations of their implementation. Thus, duplicities are avoided. A case in point was a plan for financing the construction of infrastructure in a district where such support was already provided by the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic (MVR SR). In Novotná's opinion supra-departmental status of the Plenipotentiary and the Secretariat is of crucial importance, and allows for a thorough compilation of all relevant information regarding projects and coordination of activities.

The implementation of Phare project, according to Novotná, involves several stages. The Plenipotentiary is involved at each stage of the process and provides useful recommendations in terms identifying of areas best suited for support. After a specific area is selected for support by the European Commission, the Plenipotentiary is consulted on the make-up of the tender commission, which selects from the entries those projects which will be supported by Phare funding. The Plenipotentiary also participates in the deliberation process of the commission.

According to Novotná, the Plenipotentiary and the Secretariat are important partners in the whole process and offer recommendations backed by detailed expert knowledge of the issues involved as well as experience. Overall, Novotná evaluates the cooperation with the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary positively, which, in her opinion, is due to its effective organizational structure, improvement in its personnel capacities and qualities, and last but not least, the appointment of Orgovánová to the post of the Plenipotentiary. Moreover, the willingness of the employees of the Secretariat to cooperate is another positive factor, as is the clear definition of competences of each employee. The division of project coordination is responsible for administering Phare projects, but also projects involving the Roma minority, because it is part of the agenda of human rights, encompassing all minority groups. In light of the fact that the division cannot monitor in detail all aspects and activities involving the Roma minority, it welcomes the role of the Office of the Plenipotentiary – especially its input in coordination and analysis, as well as the expertise of its employees in Roma issues, which the division of coordination of projects does not possess.

MINISTRY OF LABOR, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND FAMILY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Within the scope of competences of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, Roma issues fall within the section of family policies, which is headed by Peter Guráň. Within this section, Pavel Kaňka, is a specialist advisor in the division of social and legal protection who specializes on Roma communities.

At the time of this writing, the ministry does not have an elaborated concept which would provide a framework structure for all the activities pertaining to the social situation of the Roma. However, there is a working group within the ministry composed of employees of several sections and divisions in charge of evaluation and coordination of activities in this area.

According to Kaňka, cooperation with the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary takes place mainly in the area of offering suggestions and recommendations on existing documents, which the Plenipotentiary submits to the cabinet. In his opinion, there is room for improvement in this process because often he receives the documents to incorporate his comments only shortly before they are submitted to the cabinet. Due to time constraints potentially contentious aspects of the proposals are not discussed with the Office of the Plenipotentiary or in case further elaboration or amendments are needed. To eliminate these shortcomings, he proposes establishing working sessions, where various aspects of documents could be discussed, but he has not initiated steps to bring it about, since he opines that it is rather the role of the Plenipotentiary to come forth with such initiative.

A pilot project of field social workers is presently elaborated in cooperation with the National Labor Office (NÚP) and Spolu (Together) civic organization. The project is scheduled to be carried out in two districts – Hermanovce and Chminianske Jakubovany. According to Kaňka, the complexity of this project is of significance because it calls for the deployment of 7 employees (1 manager, 1 economist, and 5 social workers). This basic group of employees is to be complemented by social services facilities

– namely a center for personal hygiene, laundromat, cafeteria, office of personal recipient (application of measures to prevent abuse of welfare benefits, in form of providing food vouchers, providing food for children at school, etc.). These services should be further complemented by educational, training, and counseling services and activities. In Kaňka's opinion, the project is more complex in its approach than the existing community centers, as well as the program of social field-workers proposed by the Plenipotentiary. It is surprising that the program of field social workers that was elaborated by the Plenipotentiary is a constituent part of the *Comprehensive Development Programme for Roma Settlements*, so the criticism that it lacks in complexity of approach seems to be unfounded. In this regard, the activities of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family do not build on, or complement the activities of the Plenipotentiary and vice-versa, since both proposed projects are highly similar and are planned to be implemented in the same district. On top of the mentioned activities, the ministry allocates on a yearly basis financial resources to civic organizations active in social issues. Last year, 640,000 Sk were earmarked for civic organizations involved with Roma issues; this year, 900,000 Sk was allocated. There is no representative of the Office of the Plenipotentiary in the commission that evaluates projects submitted by the civic organizations.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

In 2001, the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic has formulated a document titled *Concept of Upbringing and Education of Roma Children and Pupils*. This document was approved at an operative meeting of the minister on March 19, 2001. Presently, activities of the ministry, specifically the division of minority education are based on this concept.

According to Ondrášová, director of the division of minority education, the cooperation with the Plenipotentiary is going well, even though the Plenipotentiary has expressed open criticism of the above-mentioned concept in the document titled *Priorities of the Government of the Slovak Republic in Relation to Roma Communities for the Year 2002*. According to Ondrášová, the project of Roma assistants in kindergartens and at the level of primary education is an exemplary case of cooperation between the Office of the Government, National Labor Office, and the Office of the Plenipotentiary.

The above-mentioned document *Priorities of the Government in Relation to Roma Communities for the Year 2002*, contains criticism directed toward the Ministry of Education – namely that the concept has not been taken up by the Inter-departmental commission and was not sufficiently elaborated. According to Ondrášová, the quality and suitability of the concept has been guaranteed by the involvement of representatives of state administration and non-governmental sector in the process of its elaboration. Similarly, she refuted the claim that sufficient financial resources were not allocated for the implementation of activities listed in the document, since, according to her, some financial resources were also allocated from the Phare program.

According to Ondrášová, some of the criticism is directed at areas, which are not within the competences of the division of minority education and are caused by the lengthy legislative process (it was necessary to make amendments to the status of Roma assistants and re-classify them as pedagogical employees; institutionalizing of the so-called zero-level classes). Furthermore, this concept, in Ondrášová's words, had to be incorporated into other documents of the Ministry of Education – namely *Millennium Project*, and *National Programme of Upbringing and Education*.

The implementation of the concept was also complicated by the fact that the allocation of funds for the activities from the state budget had to be formally justified, which – in light of the shortages of available financial resources for even the day-to-day operation of educational facilities – makes this task even more difficult. Moreover, this process is made even more complicated by some actors, such as the State Pedagogical Institute, which perceive the activities proposed within the concept as affording an unfair advantage to one group of students over the rest.

However, one fact needs to be stressed – that the concept that was formulated by the Ministry of Education as a document containing the aims of the official state policy in the area of education of Roma children – and as such it was not financed from the state budget. Furthermore, Ondrášová does not foresee that the implementation of the concept would be financed from the state budget – in her opinion, the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education could assist in the implementation of the concept by securing financial coverage from other sources, domestic or foreign.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

There are several sections at the Ministry of Health which are directly involved with the issue of health and healthcare of the Roma population. These include the section of healthcare strategy, section of operative activities, and State Health Institute of the Slovak Republic (ŠZÚ SR). During the year 2002, a document titled *Program of Improvement of the Environment, Hygiene, and Prevention of Infectious Diseases of Inhabitants of Roma Settlements* was elaborated by The State Health Institute.

The Ministry of Health was to cooperate with the Office of the Plenipotentiary in the implementation of several activities, however, due to unavailability of sufficient financial resources, the project was never carried out. Aside from the lack of finances, according to Karol Rybár, an employee of the State Health Institute, they should have more actively lobbied for cooperation with the Plenipotentiary.

According to Máderová, the main epidemiologist of the State Health Institute, it was not clear why the State Health Institute and the Ministry of Health were tasked with elaborating such a program, since the issue of living conditions and hygiene represents only a portion of the problem. In her opinion, a more holistic approach is needed. Furthermore, she opines that the Ministry of Health does not have the ambition or competences required to implement such a complex plan. For this reason, the program was to be incorporated into the *Comprehensive Development Programme for Roma Settlements*, which was elaborated by the Plenipotentiary and since this program does not include activities aimed at improving the healthcare system in Roma settlements, the two programs complement each other. According to Máderová, the reason why both programs were submitted separately was so that financial coverage of at least one of them would be secured in case one of the programs was not approved. She thinks that such an approach is not ideal. Furthermore, in a situation that is marked by an acute lack of financial resources, it is hard to justify financing activities or programs that go above the established standards of healthcare and are intended for a certain group within the population – a case in point is the priority given to Roma children in inoculation against Hepatitis B. Even though Slovakia is not on the list of countries which qualify to receive financial assistance for the purpose of providing immunizations to its populations – as is the case for example with Romania, it is still feasible that vaccination of the inhabitants of Roma settlements could be financed from abroad.

In Máderová's opinion, Plenipotentiary should initiate activity in this area due to the fact that the role of the Ministry of Health is in the area of prevention (presently the ministry is carrying out several projects in the form of lectures on prevention intended for children). In terms of activities intended for the Roma population, the ministry plans to carry out a project of Roma assistants to general practitioners. The assistants would accompany the practitioners to the settlements where they would facilitate contact between them and the Roma population. Representatives of the State Health Institute predict that these assistants could play an important role in the area of immunization and prevention, and they hope that they could be involved in cooperation with them.

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic (MZV SR) engages frequently in cooperation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary, since a good portion of international obligations of the Slovak Republic involves also the situation and status of the Roma minority in Slovakia. Furthermore, a lot of questions and comments related to addressing different aspects of the life of Roma communities in Slovakia are directed to the ministry. Within the ministry, section of human rights is involved to the greatest extent in cooperation with the Plenipotentiary and the Secretariat. According to the director of the section of human rights Radoslav Procházka, the cooperation takes part predominantly in three areas. These include the following:

1. The Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities regularly attends the Implementation Session on Human Dimension in Warsaw, where she has presented the situation of the Roma in Slovakia. Moreover, the Slovak Republic has contributed 15,000 Euros in support of activities of Contact Place for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI), which is affiliated with Warsaw Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). These activities were carried out in cooperation with the Plenipotentiary, who has contributed her recommendations as to what projects to expend the above-mentioned donation.

2. Yet another instance of cooperation took place whereby the Plenipotentiary has recommended a specialist to represent Slovakia in the group of experts on Roma issues in Council of Europe; the Plenipotentiary has recommended Mr. Her, whose performance at this post since his appointment was evaluated positively by the ministry.
3. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs cooperates with the Office of the Plenipotentiary also in the process of formulation, and evaluation of regular reports to the UN and Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

According to Procházka, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs deems as helpful the expert analyses, which are elaborated by the Office of the Plenipotentiary due to the fact that the employees of the Secretariat possess detailed knowledge of the issues. The fact that in previous years, the ministry has compiled its own informative materials on Roma in Slovakia for the purposes of presentation at international fora and presently they use materials elaborated by the Office of the Plenipotentiary is a testament to the expert capacities of the staff of the Secretariat.

Aside from the fact that the post of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities and the Secretariat serve as important contact points for individuals and institutions from abroad, according to Procházka, their establishment sends an important signal abroad that the Roma minority within the society is important to us – this is also evidenced by appointment of a high-level public servant to the post of the Plenipotentiary.

MINISTRY OF CONSTRUCTION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

At the time of this writing, there are two programs underway at the Ministry of Construction and regional development aimed at improving the housing situation of the Roma. They include the support of construction of rental apartments of lower standard and the support of construction of infrastructure.

The cooperation with the ministry in the area of housing was initiated by the Plenipotentiary. Next, the ministry has allotted financial resources for the construction of apartments. According to Pavol Giller, the director of the section of economy of housing at the ministry, this initiative has met with positive response from the local administration, which meant that 80% subsidy of the total construction cost of the unit would be provided by the ministry and additional 20% would be covered by involving the future tenants in the construction process. Representatives of the ministry, and the Plenipotentiary, have taken several business trips to regions of Slovakia and organized a seminar on the improvement of the housing situation of the Roma intended for mayors and representatives of local administration.

According to Giller, the cooperation with the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary has been going well because both sides are engaged in activities, which mutually complement each other. For example, the ministry provides a financial subsidy for construction itself, but not for the construction plans necessary for the initiation of the project. The Plenipotentiary, on the other hand, was successful in obtaining financial resources to cover the costs of these plans from a commission that was set up by the Plenipotentiary and includes representative of the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development.

Furthermore, the Plenipotentiary has initiated a series of informative seminars for mayors and representatives of the local administration to respond to the lack of information available about financial subsidies for housing projects. The sizable number of applications received thus far is a testament to the fact that enough information was provided at the local level about meeting the requirements which were set by the ministry.

According to Giller, initially local administrations have applied for funding of more housing units that was actually constructed, due to the fact that the administration at the district level has opposed the construction of these housing units to a large extent, due to their fear that it would incite more Roma to move to the area. The suitability of a particular district for allocation of subsidies is not reviewed by the ministry (the ministry only reviews whether formal requirements are met), nor is the decision consulted with the Office of the Plenipotentiary. Thus, if for some reason construction is halted in a certain district, it is up to the representative of the district or the mayor to address this problem. In such a case, the Office of the Plenipotentiary could intervene by initiating a meeting of the representatives of the district.

Giller deems as very important the need to delegate also other activities to the local level – not just the construction of housing and infrastructure. Such projects could include educational activities, building of community centers, projects in support of employment, and others. In his opinion, the potential of this project is only partially utilized. He recommends that the Office of the Plenipotentiary be involved in coordinating the activities and directing them to a specific district.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Since 1998, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic through the section of minority cultures has implemented several activities devoted to Roma culture. An advisory council for minorities was established, including sub-commissions for each minority, including a sub-commission for the Roma minority. A representative of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary participates in the sessions of the commission. In 2000, a seminar titled *Present and Future Perspectives of Roma Culture in Slovakia* was held in Rimavská Sobota. Furthermore, ethnological research was begun titled *Folk Architecture and the Way of Life of the Roma in Gemer Region – Malohonta and Roma in the Region of Eastern Slovakia During Second World War*. The same year, *Charter of Minority and Regional Languages* was approved by the Government; the Ministry of Culture was involved in its elaboration. In 2001, a first-ever Roma festival titled *Ternipen* was held in Snina; second annual festival was held the following year. In November 2001, the section of minority cultures has organized a first nation-wide conference titled *Perspectives of Development of Roma Culture in Slovakia on the Verge of Third Millennium* in Banská Bystrica. Other activities of the Ministry of Culture aimed at promoting the Roma culture were in the form of exhibits, publications, and compilations of studies.

Representatives of the section of minority cultures, Gabriella Jarábiková (general secretary of the section up until September 31, 2002) and Klára Csókaová (general secretary of the section at the time of this writing) have evaluated the cooperation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary under the leadership of Klára Orgovánová as much more extensive than during the tenure of Vincent Danihel, the cooperation with whom was almost non-existent.

Despite the overall positive evaluation, they have stated that the cooperation could be of even greater intensity. They have highlighted the need for more frequent personal contacts, because in their view the meetings that take place within the Inter-departmental commission are insufficient (there were only two meetings held at the time of this writing). Furthermore, they propose that the flow of information between the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary and the section of minority cultures, because they would welcome a more detailed overview of the activities in the area of culture, which were supported by the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary. They receive information in the form of materials mainly through the Inter-departmental commission, or through presentations of results of some activity carried out by the Office. They would welcome, however, if they would be involved to a greater extent in the process of formulation of projects and documents.

They attribute the above-mentioned shortcomings to the focus of the Plenipotentiary primarily on addressing the social issues of Roma population, and understand that culture represents only a marginal portion in the scope of her activities. At the same time, they are aware of shortcomings in the approach of the ministry, and as an example mentioned the fact that the Office of the Plenipotentiary does not have a representative in the commission of the representatives of minorities.

In their view, it would be useful if working group with a narrower focus be formed, which would meet four times a year to keep its members informed about the prepared projects, and have the opportunity to get involved in these. They are aware of the aim of the Plenipotentiary to establish a “Roma House,” that would be a showcase of Roma culture and traditions and would have a positive influence on the further development of Roma identity (this intent was contained in the *Priorities of the Government in Relation to Roma Communities* [2002], however, they have thus far not received an offer of cooperation in this project from the Office of the Plenipotentiary).

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

Most activities of cooperation between the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (MV SR) and the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary involve the commission for solving racially motivated violence within the ministry, presided by lieutenant colonel Mikuš. The commission is comprised of members of the police force, representatives of state administration and non-governmental organizations. Representative of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary also attends the sessions of the commission. The commission's competences include proposing systemic solutions and implementing measures aimed at preventing racially motivated violence. The measures proposed are based on knowledge gained by monitoring of the situation by a way of regularly scheduled monitoring trips of the members of the commission (the destination of last trip that took place on June 3 – 7, 2002 was the region of eastern Slovakia).

The cooperation with the Secretariat was evaluated by Mikuš as very good. The contact between members of the two institutions is frequent, since an employee of the Secretariat is a member of the commission.

ACTIVITIES OF THE INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COMMISSION

Inter-departmental Commission for Affairs of Roma Communities was established in 2001. The first session of the commission took place on December 17, 2001. The commission is presided by the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities, and its members include representatives of all ministries with the exception of the Ministry of Traffic, Posts and Telecommunications, and the Ministry for the Administration and Privatization of the State Property of the Slovak Republic. The commission was established with the aim to increase the effectiveness of the coordination of activities of individual ministries in such a way as to foster a holistic approach to the issues and avoid an uncoordinated approach in the implementation of activities and utilization of financial resources.

The commission has set the following goals as stipulated by the *Statute* (2002):

- coordinates the tasks delegated by the Government of the Slovak Republic to individual ministries and other institutions of state administration within the *Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Addressing Problems of the Roma Minority*,
- prepares and formulates conceptual background documents/proposals for the Government and responds to proposals of other state institutions involving Roma communities,
- evaluates the implementation of the resolutions of the Government and measures taken by ministries regarding Roma communities,
- cooperates with representatives of state institutions in the process of formulation of proposals of state policies regarding Roma communities,
- proposes and initiates the allocation of financial resources for supplemental programs intended for support of Roma communities; participates in these programs or evaluates their utility and effectiveness,
- compiles data on the situation and development of the Roma community if necessary – at least once annually; elaborates a summary report on the situation in Roma communities,
- cooperates with state institutions, Roma and pro-Roma organizations and evaluates their recommendations regarding various aspects of life in Roma communities,
- submits to the Government and relevant state institutions proposals and recommendations on issues regarding Roma communities,
- the commission and its members are entitled within the scope of their competences to request information and statements from organs of state administration, including those that are not represented in the commission, as well as other organs of public administration; the same applies to requesting information and statements from the representatives of the higher territorial units (VÚC).

Even though the Inter-departmental commission was vested with many tasks as stipulated by the *Statute of the Inter-departmental Commission for Affairs of Roma Communities*, the original intent of the role of the commission was not achieved and thus its scope of activities was narrowed to facilitating the exchanges of information between ministries about the undergoing activities and programs. The informative nature of the sessions was apparent during the deliberation of the first such meeting whereby individual members have presented summaries of the activities that have taken place within each respective ministry.

Despite this change, representatives of ministries have stressed the importance of the exchange of information. The representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, emphasized the importance to keep informed of activities in other ministries for the purposes of presenting these at international fora.

According to the provisions of the *Statute*, the Inter-departmental commission is to convene at least three times a year. However, since the first session held on December 17, 2001, it has only convened once. One of the reasons for this was the inability of state secretaries and general directors of sections of individual ministries to attend due to their other work-related duties. The representatives of ministries tasked to evaluate the workings of the commission, generally had positive things to say about it, even though they did mention that the commission should meet more frequently. Some representatives of ministries would also welcome issue-oriented working sessions with participation of representatives of only those ministries and/or institutions involved in the given area.

EVALUATION OF THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE SECRETARIAT OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY AND INSTITUTIONS OF STATE ADMINISTRATION

All ministries and institutions of the state administration agree that there has been an improvement in the workings of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities since 2001. They see the difference in the approach – in that they are attending meetings with the Plenipotentiary, they have been approached with proposals of cooperation and were involved in the implementation of various projects. Many employees of state administration did not have personal contacts with the then Plenipotentiary Vincent Danihel. Kinga Novotná, the director of the division of project coordination at the Office of the Government has stated that the Secretariat, based on a previous agreement often provides them with needed information, while the previous Plenipotentiary often took advantage of the 30 day official period afforded to him by law to do so.

The changes in the organizational structure of the Secretariat has lead to improvements in its operations. This means that employees of state administration know exactly whom to contact if they need some specific information, since each employee specializes on a certain area. Thus, they do not have to direct all of their inquiries to the Plenipotentiary. Under the previous leadership, such division of duties within the Secretariat did not exist and it was not exactly clear whom to turn to aside from the Plenipotentiary. The present organizational structure is also more task-specific and flexible.

In the process of elaboration of the evaluation of the cooperation of the Plenipotentiary and the state administration, based on interviews with the employees of state administration and relevant documents – the authors of this evaluations have come to the conclusion that employees of the state administration lack a pro-active approach to addressing the problems of the Roma minority. Representatives of individual ministries often do not contact the Plenipotentiary with proposals of cooperation, even though they are aware that they could be involved in many activities. They rather expect the initiative to come from the Office of the Plenipotentiary. The reasons they often list include the scope of their duties which does not allow them to follow closely the developments in this area and assume a more active approach to cooperation. Furthermore, active participation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary and involvement in the implementation of certain projects usually requires the allotment of financial resources from the budgets of individual ministries. In light of the shortages of financial resources, it is a more acceptable approach for the ministries not to enter into such joint ventures and leave it up to the Plenipotentiary to address the issue of financial coverage for projects.

Representatives of some ministries do not perceive many of the activities intended for the Roma community as having the effect of leveling the playing field in terms of their standard of living and chances for success. Presented with situation of insufficient financial resources for standard activities and operations of ministries, they view these activities as going above the norm and feel that they should be financed from sources other than the state budget or – at least sources other than those allotted for individual ministries. Thus, they expect that it is within the competence of the Plenipotentiary to obtain financial coverage for projects from abroad. It is within the competence of the Plenipotentiary, to an extent, to coordinate the activities of state administration, local administration and the non-governmental sector (given that the parties mentioned are willing to engage in cooperation), and in so doing to pool the resources of the actors involved. However, the Plenipotentiary cannot seek financial resources other than the state budget for activities or policies for which the final responsibility rests with the state, since they have been defined by the state as official policies in a specific area. According to representatives of certain ministries, however, it is in the scope of competences of the Plenipotentiary to intervene in a specific Roma community or district, where Roma reside. Such an intervention would take the form of a meeting of all the parties involved and could take, place for example, in case the representative of the district intends to implement a project of the construction of housing of lower standard and a portion of the district or the district council is opposed to it. However, such expectations of the Office of the Plenipotentiary place a high demand on this post that does not have an effective network of regional structures (with the exception of a satellite office in Prešov). It is clear that it is not equipped to intervene at all places where a problem might arise. This problem could be rectified by establishing several regional offices of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary or to delegate the right to intervene to representatives of local levels of state administration.

The employees of the state administration whom we interviewed consider it of importance that the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities has a supra-departmental status. They opine that such a status guarantees a greater level of acceptance of the Plenipotentiary by the actors with whom the Plenipotentiary cooperates. The Office of the Plenipotentiary has demonstrated that it functions effectively and can have an impact. Other, alternative status of the Office would not allow it to effectively approach the complex problems of Roma communities.

COOPERATION WITH REGIONAL OFFICES

APPROACH TO COOPERATION

The cooperation of regional offices with the Office of the Plenipotentiary involves mostly participation in meetings and seminars, elaboration of requested materials, including a yearly report on Roma settlements, as well as the implementation of the resolutions of the Government. In a view of an employee of a regional office in Košice, in comparison to the activities aimed at addressing problems of the Roma on the regional level, the Office of the Plenipotentiary serves as a methodological center.

In Prešov and Košice regions, the cooperation with the Plenipotentiary also includes participation in the decision-making process of a commission reviewing and elaborating documents submitted to the Government, as well as coordination – service of projects financed from Phare program.

In cooperation with the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary, the regional office in Košice was successful in implementing a project of Roma civic guards; to establish a healthcare center including a pediatrician and a general practitioner at Lunik IX; and in cooperation with International Organization on Migration (IOM), to address the problem of migration of Roma citizens to countries of the European Union. Since 2001, cooperation is underway within the project of *Improvement of Infrastructure of Roma Settlements financed by Phare program*. Furthermore, in cooperation with organization InfoRoma, the regional office in Košice has carried out a survey of settlements in Košice region.

In Trnava region, a project involving social field-workers is underway. Within this project, two positions of social field-workers have been created at the district office in Trnava and Skalica; the duties of these employees are limited to performing social work amongst the Roma population. At other district offices in the Trnava region, there are also social field-workers active, but their scope of duties includes also other activities.

The common characteristic of the operations of regional offices in their approach to addressing problems of Roma communities and cooperation with the Plenipotentiary is that the employee responsible for these tasks carries them out while performing other activities within the section of social and legal protection, such as preventing drug dependency and crime. These employees, due to the sheer scope of their agenda, are stretched thin. Especially in regions with a higher proportion of Roma population, they cannot devote adequate attention to addressing problems with which the Roma are confronted.

In Nitra region, at the regional office, there has been a commission established specializing in work with the Roma community. Based on its statute, the commission is to convene four times a year, but due to decreased demand of the situation, it does so only bi-annually.

Comparison of the functioning of the Secretariat of the Plenipotentiary during the tenure of Vincent Danihel and Klára Orgovánová.

- Danihel: ad hoc approach to addressing problems
- Orgovánová:
 - more frequent meetings which representatives of district offices are invited,
 - addressing specific problems,
 - more systematic organization and coordination of activities,
 - after the satellite office was opened, some of the agenda was transferred from the Bratislava-based office;
 - increase in intensity of cooperation; improvement in communication with district representatives,
 - face-to-face communication,
 - greater transparency of operations.

PROPOSALS AND COMMENTS FROM REGIONAL OFFICES REGARDING COOPERATION WITH THE SECRETARIAT OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

- Hold meetings devoted only to a single specific problem (not cumulated ones),
- holistic approach to future activities is missing,
- decision-making on financing by-passes regional office
- there are times when the employees are not aware of what tasks they should be performing within the cooperation on a project with the Plenipotentiary and within the *Strategy of the Government*, respectively (Nitra),
- insufficient financial resources for the implementation of the *Strategy of the Government*,
- concern for preserving the mode of operations of a regional office (Prešov) in regard to proposed change of its statute – approach considered to be unfair and backward,
- facilitate specialization of one regional office employee in approaches to addressing the problems of the Roma,
- after financing from Phare program comes to an end, the project cannot continue – it is necessary to secure funding from other sources,
- no decentralization took place (Banská Bystrica) – the consequences are as follows:
 - complicated communication,
 - several prepared programs are not being implemented,
 - the coordination and implementation of projects from Bratislava is too expensive and ineffective,
 - lack of success in institutionalizing priorities,
 - lack of support for implementation of prospective projects (Kari Union, Ghandi's school, healthcare worker's assistant),
- apply the organizational structure model of the Roma bureau after Hungary, with headquarters located in the Capital (5 – 6 employees), branch offices at the regional level, or self-administration units; establish offices in regions with greater proportion of Roma population,
- establish trans-departmental regional teams to address problems of the Roma community,
- increase the number of employees of the Secretariat to include specialists in field work,
- establish an emergency reserve fund at the level of regional offices (KÚ) or higher territorial units (Košice) for unexpected developments, such as an increased occurrence of fires in housing units inhabited by Roma after the beginning of the heating period, etc.

RECAPITULATION OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH OF THE OFFICE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE GOVERNMENT FOR ROMA COMMUNITIES TO ADDRESSING PROBLEMS OF THE ROMA

1. It is advised to elaborate projects aimed at revitalization of marginalized regions with focus on economic policies, employment, labor market, housing, education, and healthcare. These projects should include the cooperation of local administrations, higher territorial units, NGOs, district and regional offices of state administration, district and regional labor offices, employees, and all relevant institutions, such as schools and religious institutions. The complexity of the approach presupposes – especially at the level of state institutions – a supra-departmental approach, effective utilization of resources of the ministries, national labor offices, and non-governmental organizations, as well as an adoption of effective legislation on decentralization of public administration.
2. It is necessary to keep underlining the internal differentiation of the Roma population in Slovakia to achieve the desired shift in the public opinion. Furthermore, it is necessary to differentiate systemic, as well as local (target specific) measures based on the demand for such measures by a social group, which is dependent on assistance from without. Such an approach involves the implementation of policies intended to mobilize individuals within the society. Such policies should be targeted at the whole society, not just the Roma communities.
3. Significantly re-design the system of social welfare allocation in the Slovak Republic, with focus on stimulating and motivational aspects of social welfare; identify and re-define groups of poor and socially excluded members of the population and adopt measures to regulate the degree of social exclusion on a central, regional, and local level with focus on individual needs of the socially excluded citizens. On a central level, this approach pre-supposes a systemic change from paternalistic policies of the state, toward empowering the citizens, client. This approach also calls for a change in allocation of resources in the form of a shift from a top-down, institutional approach to a bottom-up approach whereby the individual client would seek out the services of the institutions.
4. It is advised to continue in the policies toward the Roma minority implemented during the tenure of the new Plenipotentiary (Klára Orgovánová), i.e. to continue in those activities that open up the closed system of segregated Roma settlements. If this approach fails, it will lead to the multiplication of the present unfavorable state of affairs. Target-specific measures are necessary, but they are not enough. It is necessary to differentiate between those measures to be directed toward the center of Roma communities themselves, such as those aimed at improving the infrastructure, and those that should be directed from the communities outward to secure social inclusion.
5. Within the framework of the reform of public administration, it is advised to engage in close cooperation with representatives of districts where there are Roma settlements. In order for measures to have a positive impact on the life of the Roma, it is equally important that within the decentralization process, local administration is prepared to accept the delegated competences and effectively implement public policies. This does not entail strictly an administrative approach confined to the legislative regulations and norms.
6. It is necessary to involve the Roma in the process of governance on the district level, to offer consultations and to train the representatives of local administration in positive approaches to establish contact with minorities; to train employees of local administration in principles of public policy; to offer assistance in overcoming tensions in relations between the Roma minority and the majority population.
7. In regard to the health situation of the Roma, it is necessary to consider the abolishment of mandatory preventive medical checks as measures to protect health. Since the overall health of an individual is

primarily determined by the living conditions, nutritional and hygienic practices, the socio-economic causes of the phenomenon of social exclusion need to be addressed in order to achieve improvement in the state of health of the Roma population.

8. A systemic change in the organizational structure of sections of social affairs within district offices can free up time and resources to cover the expenditure of field-based community work performed by social workers. Of importance, however, is their proper training and involvement of individuals familiar with local specificities of different communities.
9. It is necessary to create networks of qualified field and community workers capable of providing and ordering public services, which would lead to job creation.
10. Despite the fact that target-specific measures directed at addressing the problems of Roma communities do not represent a holistic approach, it is advised that the policies initiated by the Office of the Plenipotentiary in 2001 in this area be continued. It is the interlinkage between and coordination of highly target-specific and intensive programs intended for the most vulnerable portion of the Roma population and programs directed to combat social exclusion on a top-down basis, which could prove effective. Cooperation and coordination between all actors and institutions involved in the process of implementation of systemic and specific, target-oriented programs could foster the development of contacts between Roma and non-Roma and act as a main tool for preventing the social exclusion of the Roma minority.

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